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A DETECTIVE STORY

SHADOWING the BLUE TRIANGLE

BY · CHARLES · FULTON · OURSLER ·

Redfield Ingall's Story, "THE CASE OF CAPTAIN FORTESCUE," Will Be Our Next.

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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SHADOWING THE BLUE TRIANGLE

A DETECTIVE STORY

By CHARLES FULTON OURSLER

CHAPTER ONE

THE GRAY PLAGUE

"A VERY excited gentleman wants to see you, Mr. Brand!"

The piquant face of Enid Starr, the private secretary and confidential assistant of Gordon Brand, smiled at him in the doorway that led from his private consulting room to his laboratory in the rear. He glanced up from a table where test tubes, beakers and other apparatus of the criminal research worker lay strewn about and smiled at sight of her.

"A very excited gentleman wants to see me, does he?" he replied. "I wonder what he is excited about, Enid? Show the excited gentleman into the consulting-room and we'll look him over."

A moment later, having removed his white coat for the more conventional tweed of business, Brand entered his receiving office just as a man came bursting through the other door with a surprising lack of ceremony. The stranger was evidently laboring under some strong emotion. His black hair was dishevelled, he twisted his curled and waxed mustaches with nervous fingers and his black eyes glittered with excitement. His whole huge bulk seemed quivering, but whether with alarm, anger or some other feeling Brand could not guess. He slammed the door behind him and faced Gordon Brand belligerently.

"Mr. Gordon Brand, I understand you are a detective," he blurted out loudly.

"Then, sir," answered Brand with a quiet twinkle in his eye, "I am sorry, but your understanding is sadly at fault. I am not a detective."

"Not a detective! Aren't you Gordon Brand? Didn't you find the murderer of Esther Moreland last week after the police force confessed itself defeated? Hasn't your

name been in the papers, week in, week out, in connection with the detection of skilled criminals. Why aren't you a detective?"

Brand studied his visitor keenly before he made answer.

"I am not a detective," he repeated with emphasis. "If you are in need of the services of a detective you must go to police headquarters, where you will find them in droves."

The stranger slapped his gloves against his open palm in mighty impatience.

"I don't care!" he cried. "Whatever you call yourself, I need you. I need your help. I'm pursued by fiends. I'm hounded by demons. I'm chased by the furies. If it continues another day I shall go mad. You *must* assist me!"

Brand reached into a desk drawer and drew forth a small tumbler and a glass. He poured out a draught and offered it to his caller.

"Drink this," he said kindly, but with a note of firm command in his voice. "You are a little overwrought, that is all. Your nerves are too much at a tension. Take it easy, old fellow. Calm yourself and then tell me your troubles. Have a chair."

As a man unaccustomed to receive orders, the man seated himself, after swallowing the contents of the glass at a single gulp. Then, with an evident effort, he managed to pull himself together, but it was with a trembling hand that he offered Brand his card.

"Mr. Pertelevitch Rogden, Petrograd," was the name inscribed on the little pasteboard. Beside the name was a royal crest, of which Brand made a careful mental note. Then he turned his boyish blue eyes on his nervous visitor.

"To set your doubts at rest, Mr. Rogden," he said, "let me say that I am a private investigator. I own and operate a private investigation agency that has established connections all over the world. Here in New York I employ a staff of capable men and women who work with me. When a man has a matter of a nature too private to consult the police which he wishes investigated he comes here."

Evident relief glowed on Rogden's face, but his only reply was to lean forward and say:

"Do you believe in witchcraft, Mr. Brand?"

Instantly Brand checked an inclination to smile. However absurd the question might seem, the troubles on Rogden's mind were evidently real ones. They were causing him acute mental distress, which manifested itself in his smallest actions. So, although Brand began to suspect that Rogden was a candidate for a psychiatric clinic more than a client, he resolved to wait.

"What do you mean by witchcraft?" he parried.

"Spells! Hauntings! Phantoms riding through the air casting their evil conjurations on those they hate. Black art and the evil eye."

Pale and actually shuddering, the unnerved man gazed earnestly into Brand's face, as if to find hope of comfort there. But the investigator realized that if he did not act sharply Rogden might become hysterical.

"Mr. Rogden, I must beg of you to be explicit," he said sternly. "These—pardon me—wild words of yours mean nothing whatsoever to me. If you have a case, please state the facts; but kindly do not persist in asking me if I believe in fairy tales."

This had the effect which Brand desired. Rogden rose and paced up and down the room a moment, as if regaining his composure. Then he turned, and with a new dignity and restraint that impressed Brand, he began:

"A remarkable story, Mr. Brand. I am a haunted man! I am under the spell of a witch. Wait! I will be definite. You understand that I am in this country on a most important government mission. Nothing but misfortune seems to have attended me ever since I came to this country a year ago. I brought my mother with me when I arrived; she died not two weeks later and is buried here. That was the beginning of all my troubles.

"On my last visit to this country, not quite two years ago, I had made the acquaintance of a beautiful American girl. Her name is Berenice Patterson, and she lives on West Garland avenue. It has been arranged that we are to be married. Two weeks ago, Mr. Brand, after a somewhat extended stay in Washington, I returned to the Hotel Rembrandt, where I remain when in this city, and retired very late. I awoke the next morning to find a very extraordinary thing. On my bureau was an ordinary dinner-plate that had been heavily coated with lamp-blacking. Scrawled in this lamp-blacking, as if with a matchstick, were the words:

"'You, sweet Rogden, are my mate.—Laggis.'

"You may imagine how puzzled I was at that. I demanded an explanation from the proprietor of the hotel, Colonel Blackstone, a really charming old gentleman, but he could give me none. They made an investigation, but nothing came of it. Familiar as I am with the Russian secret societies—their tricks are legion—I did feel some uneasiness; but I was utterly unprepared for what happened later.

"The next evening I naturally called at the home of Miss Patterson. To my consternation, her brother and aged mother informed me she had been missing from home for two days. I left the house determined to report the matter to the police. As I crossed Garland avenue I saw an automobile speeding toward me, and as the chauffeur saw me he put on the brakes. The machine slowed down and, as I was passing, the door was thrown open. A face was looking at me from the darkness of the interior of the cab.

"Mr. Brand, that face was horrible! It was the grimiest, most frightful old hag I have ever looked at. She leered at me in a sort of affectionate manner, as if she had known me all my life. I could see her features plainly, and they were unlike any I had ever seen anywhere before. She craned her neck toward me.

"'I am Laggis!' she said to me in a whining voice like a cat's. 'I am Laggis, your mate. And just to show you that it's true, I put a new spell on you, too—"The spell of the twisted foot."' With that she laughed in an uncanny sort of way and shut the door. The machine drove off hurriedly northward.

"Mr. Brand," finished Rogden solemnly, "after I reported the disappearance of my fiancée to police headquarters I went to my hotel room. And that very night, as I was climbing into bed, I twisted my ankle. It has given me severe pain ever since."

Brand gazed at Pertelevitch Rogden with dancing eyes. Here was a problem that stirred his soul to its deepest; a problem with which he would rejoice to grapple until he had solved it, if it required the rest of his natural days—if, of course, Pertelevitch Rogden was not a madman. But Brand's face seldom told tales. He merely smiled in a puzzled, encouraging way and asked:

"Did anything else happen?"

"*Did* there!"

The injured note in Rogden's voice was not to be mistaken. He took another turn up and down the office, and then again faced the detective.

"My real mate is still missing," he said. "Neither her relatives nor myself have heard a word from her, but I met that old hag again last night. I recognized the automobile as it drove up beside me on upper Broadway, for I remembered that it had a large inverted blue triangle in a blue finish on the door. I suppose it was only a few moments after eleven o'clock. It is not saying too much, Mr. Brand, to tell you I felt a chill run down my spine when that door was flung open and I saw the creature's ugly face again.

"She put her hands cup-shaped around her mouth and —I quote her exactly—this is what she said:

"'Hey! Hey! Hey!
Your hair is turning gray!
Before another sun has died
Hey! Hey! Hey!'

"Then she dropped her hands and grinned at me and said, 'Laggis loves you, sweet Rogden. She loves you so much she put the gray plague on you.' She shut the

door again, and away raced her machine. That's what I've come to see you about, Mr. Brand. What do you think about it?"

But Gordon Brand made him no answer. For once in his life the investigator betrayed the intense astonishment which at that moment was sweeping over him. With open mouth and staring eyes he was watching a moving, living miracle.

"Mr. Rogden," he said hoarsely, "that old woman told you your hair would turn gray within twenty-four hours?"

"Before another sun had died were her words," answered Rogden.

"Well, Rogden, for God's sake go look in the mirror!"

With an awkward bound the frightened Russian reached the glass on the opposite wall. He stared at his reflection and a frightened gasp came from him like a groan from a condemned man.

His black hair was changing. Moment after moment it was turning gray before his eyes.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THING THAT WEPT

GORDON BRAND assisted his unhappy client back to his chair.

"Be calm, my dear Mr. Rogden," he urged. "This is a serious, an extraordinary state of affairs, but you must meet it like a man. Why, consider what an experience it is! I have been working all day in my laboratory there. I've got radium and 'T. T. T.' and about everything else there, and I thought some of those chemical combinations were the greatest mysteries I should ever encounter, but you have given me a real mystery. Buckle up, now. We'll whip this thing, whatever it is."

But Pertelevitch Rogden held up his hands in despair.

"One cannot fight the supernatural," he insisted in a hollow voice. "The devil and his wife are against me. I came here for your help, but I have no hope."

Brand faced about with some asperity.

"Mr. Rogden," he remonstrated, "as a man of intelligence you do not mean to sit there and tell me you *believe* in this thing? Why, it's trickery, of course. We shall outwit them."

Rogden sadly shook his head.

"That is the trouble with you Americans," he said mournfully. "You do not know that in my country the cabalists still pronounce their incantations and the weird women cast their spells."

It was quite evident to Brand that, for all his intelligence and education, his client was thoroughly impressed with the superstitions of his country, and that it would be folly, under the circumstances, to argue with him at that time. But he made up his mind, when the case was over, to prove to Rogden that black magic died when people found out the world was round. He shook the downcast Russian gently by the shoulders.

"My dear fellow," he bantered, "you are worrying too much about nothing at all. You must forget."

"Forget!"

There was a tragic note in the big man's voice as he turned his troubled eyes up to the face of the buoyant, optimistic young American.

"Ah, Mr. Brand, I have too much to remember. I cannot forget the devil-woman at Rask. That is a village in Poland. I was in command of the troops quartered in the village for a week. There was some trouble with the peasantry. Very often when the impudent scoundrels are shot down for interference their women go crazy. Then the natives call them devil-women, and they are said to have the voice of prophecy. Well, this devil-woman at Rask heaped her curses on me. She blamed me for a massacre the day before—a massacre in which her three sons were killed. I have been afraid of old women ever since."

Brand heard all this with a set countenance that revealed nothing of his inmost thoughts. But one who knew him well would have found food for thought in the abrupt manner in which he asked Rogden if he did not realize he might be followed by political enemies instead of by supernatural beings.

"No doubt of it," answered Rogden. "I have papers of priceless value, and I have constantly returned to my hotel room and found my possessions had been searched. But no documents of state which I possess will ever be found—I have too secure a hiding-place. Too secure for any one except this infernal Laggis. She appears to be omnipresent."

"How is that?" asked Brand.

Without verbal reply the Russian reached into his breast coat pocket and drew forth an odd-shaped piece of cardboard. It was cut in the form of a triangle, and the cardboard was of bright blue. It was about six inches each way.

"This," said Rogden impressively, as he held the triangle up high, "was on my coverlet when I awoke this morning. It contains an invitation and a threat."

He passed the singular relic over to the investigator, who examined it with eager interest. It was hollow in the center, and in form and size much resembled the drawing shapes of celluloid used by artists and draughtsmen. Brand shot a sudden question at Rogden.

"Does the symbol of a blue triangle mean anything to you?" he asked.

Rogden colored and cleared his throat and answered that it did not. And Brand knew that he lied. The investigator turned the triangle over. The reverse side was plain white, and on this a message had been written. Brand read it aloud:

"Laggis, your mate, calls you," he read. "Laggis will not be denied. The spells that Laggis gave you, the twisted foot and the hair that will turn, will show you the strength of the brew she makes. Laggis calls. Be at the door of the Red Garter Café to-night at nine o'clock. Fail not, or woe, woe, woe is the last word of Laggis."

In spite of the ominous portent of the affair, Gordon Brand could not restrain his laughter at this. The absurdity of a witch casting spells over a man in the twentieth century, and in the heart of a nation's metropolis, was in itself sufficiently absurd, but when she made an appointment with him at a place like the Red Garter Café it was too much for his sense of humor.

"Why, she will scandalize all the respectable old witches who used to ride broomsticks over Salem town," he cried merrily, and even the disturbed Rogden was forced to smile. The investigator, though by no means attracted to his client personally, patted him kindly on the shoulder.

"It *is* a queer mess," he commented. "There is certainly something strange in back of it. You may rest assured, though, that Laggis is not a real witch. We are happily beyond the age of superstition. This is a clever scheme, and I fancy it is leading up to something serious. And that we must prevent."

"Yes!" fumed Rogden. "You laugh at what you call my superstition, but I do believe it is a real witch. There are devil-women in Poland. And look at my foot, look at my hair!"

Brand put up a soothing hand.

"You have anticipated my next move," he said coolly. "I have no wish to look at your foot. But I should like to examine your hair more attentively at my leisure."

Rogden remained seated dismally in his chair while Brand secured a magnifying-glass and a shears. With this held just above the hair of his client, now turned entirely gray, the investigator fingered the thick locks curiously. Once he bent over them and sniffed, but lifted his head again with an air of plain disappointment. Then, without so much as a question, he snipped a generous cutting from the crown of Rogden's head. This he placed carefully in an envelope and locked it in his safe.

Then he stood in front of Rogden, and his manner indicated that the interview was at an end.

"The only thing to do now, Mr. Rogden," he said, "is to keep the tryst which Laggis asks. I shall accompany you to the Red Garter Café to-night at nine o'clock. Where and when shall I meet you?"

Rogden rose gloomily from his chair.

"Call at the Hotel Rembrandt at eight," he said. "You need not phone from the desk. It is just an apartment hotel. Come right up to my room, No. 727. Get there as early as you can; I like to talk to you."

With a sorrowful glance the huge Russian took his leave. For the moment Brand stood alone in his simply but richly appointed office. Then he pressed a buzzer and presently Enid Starr opened the door.

"A problem, Enid!" he cried merrily. "The strangest problem that ever was told. I fancy I shall need your help on this."

It was Brand's habit to relate all that happened to his beautiful young secretary. He found it relieved his mind, and that, in explaining matters to one who knew nothing of the facts, he unconsciously marshaled them into such an order that the gaps were made plainer to himself. In detail he related to her all that Pertelevitch Rogden had told him and all that happened during their interview. He hugely enjoyed Enid's astonishment. Her incredulity as he related the visual change of the color of Rogden's hair emphasized to his own mind the really preposterous manifestation which he had lately witnessed.

"Now, Enid," said Brand, "we shall get busy. Send a telegram to Bliss at my Washington office, and tell him to wire me at once all he knows about Rogden and his friends in this country; what Rogden is here for, and anything he can get. Tell him to rush me the information."

This Enid did, and in a short time the message had been phoned to the telegraph office.

"Now," continued Brand, "if you will just look through that cabinet of newspaper clippings under the 'R's' and see what we have about Mr. Rogden here, I shall be deeply obliged."

Enid made him a mischievous courtesy—they were on the best of terms, these two—and passed to an adjoining room.

"Here's something!" she called, and came tripping back with two clippings, one quite old and yellowed, the other new. Brand spread them carefully on his desk, and the two bent over, their heads close together, to read. The older clipping was an account of a long series of bloody massacres in Poland, some twenty years before, and in running his finger down the creased and soiled columns Brand soon found the name of Capt. Pertelevitch Rogden.

"The most hated man in Poland," read Enid aloud. "He dare not pass through the streets unless heavily guarded. His treatment of the people have aroused the deepest enmity toward him. His atrocities have made his name abominated throughout the land."

Brand's fist came down on the desk with a resounding bang.

"The scoundrel!" he cried. "I would give up his case if it were not such a beautiful mystery. Perhaps I shall not interfere in the final outcome, after all, Enid; but we shall solve the thing, anyway. What is in that other clipping?"

Enid spread it out and together they read it. The date stamped in the margin showed that it had been published about a year before. It stated merely that Gen. Pertelevitch Rogden and his invalid mother had arrived in this country on a secret mission, and that they had proceeded to Washington.

"Promoted to a general, eh?" remarked Brand. "And what the devil did he bring an invalid mother along for when he came on a secret mission? Rogden, the cruel tyrant, the most hated man in Poland, is not the mother-worshiping kind. There's something queer in that."

It was now close on the noon hour and, other matters arising to claim his attention meanwhile, Brand dismissed the Rogden matter from his mind until evening and its appointment should come. When dinner hour had arrived, and Enid had said good-night, Brand locked his safe, which now held the lock of Rogden's hair and the mysterious blue triangle which the Russian had found on his breast that morning, and then reached for his directory. In this he found the address of the Red Garter Café, an East Side resort, as Brand now learned; a strange place for Laggis to have picked for the meeting.

Brand now prepared his own plans for this meeting. At first he meant to have his limousine near the corner, ready to give chase if Laggis attempted to escape in an automobile as she had hitherto been able to do. But Brand decided his car might be recognized; he did not know who he was fighting, and so he arranged with a taxi chauffeur whom he knew well to be at the corner, ready to get away in an instant should it become necessary.

Then, after a hastily snatched dinner at a restaurant, the investigator repaired, shortly before eight o'clock, to the elegant Hotel Rembrandt, where people who like the conveniences of a hotel and the comforts of home combined, and who can afford the price of the combination, dwell in satisfaction. Brand had been here many times.

He rode up to the seventh floor and soon found No. 727. There was a deep stillness all about, and as the investigator knocked on Rogden's door the echoes played hide-and-seek up and down the dimly-lit corridors. There was no response. Brand knocked again, a little impatiently, for he was certain Rogden must be there.

Then to his startled ears came an unearthly sound. It was the eerie, wailing voice of a woman, and it came from behind the door.

At first it was a low moan, piteous and whining, but gradually it swelled into a hoarse sobbing, a groaning, a gnashing of teeth. It wept like a damned soul.

A burst of wild laughter followed, the clapping of hands and the shrill cry of a banshee, much like a demented old crone. Then sudden, mysterious silence.

Brand tried the door, but it was locked. He looked down at his feet and a new understanding came to him. A stream of crimson was stealing from under the door, growing wider and deeper every moment.

The room next to Rogden's was open, and Brand rushed in. He reached for the telephone and asked for the manager. When the manager came he told him he had come to see his friend, Mr. Rogden; that he could not get in, but that blood was coming from under the door.

The manager, the house detective and a white-faced clerk rode up on the elevator. They came up to Brand in silence, and the manager fitted a house key into the lock of Rogden's door. They opened it and the four men stood in a group at the threshold.

The body of Rogden lay face downward on the floor. Blood was pouring from a deep knife wound in the back of his neck. As Brand bent over him he saw at once his client had been murdered.

With a bewildered feeling Brand glanced around him. This room communicated with no others; the only door to it was the one through which he had just entered. One window was open, but beneath it was a sheer drop of seven stories, with not a cornice to break one's fall.

Who, then, had committed this murder, and how had he or she escaped? Who had wept and laughed but a moment before? And where was she now?

CHAPTER THREE

A DEAD MAN'S POCKET

GORDON BRAND acted with characteristic energy and decision.

Turning quickly to the three shaken men at the door, he suggested with a calmness that did much to restore their nerve that they call a doctor, though it was useless and a mere formality, and that they notify police headquarters. The manager knew Brand, and the investigator asked his permission to make a professional examination of the premises while they were waiting for the men from headquarters. To this the manager readily agreed.

The scene at first glance revealed very little. The investigator first centered his attention on the wound, examining it minutely, and firmly fixing in his mind the exact point where the knife had entered at the base of the back of the neck and where it had emerged, almost at the mouth of the victim. Evidently Brand regarded this as a matter of the utmost importance.

It will be seen that Brand, who was an eminently practical and energetic man, focussed his activities on practical things. His mind was utterly baffled at how the murderer had escaped, and this puzzle assumed a peculiar significance in the light of the ghastly persecution to which the Russian officer had been subjected before he was taken off. But he refused to stop work because he could not understand that. He went after what clues might have been left behind with the sublime faith of a successful man that ultimately victory would be his.

Thus shaking himself free of all idle superstitions about Laggis, the witch, Brand knelt beside the body. It was a gruesome business, this necessarily cold-blooded examination of the body of a man with whom, so lately, Brand had held such an intimately personal interview. But this very fact urged Brand on. He resolved to keep working on the case now until the murderer, whoever it might be, was known to him.

Rogden had evidently just finished dressing for the evening. He was in a Tuxedo suit, and his mysteriously gray hair had been combed back neatly. There was no blow, no bruise, no discoloration, no disarray of his clothes to indicate that there had been a struggle. It looked as if the blow had been dealt swiftly, suddenly, in the dark silence.

Now Rogden began going through the pockets of the dead man's coat. Beyond a few trinkets and belongings of no interest in the circumstances, he found two things of prime importance. One was a page torn from a copy of the evening *News*, and it required but a quick glance to show Brand why it had been of such interest to Rogden. The roving, prowling eyes of the investigator lit suddenly on this item:

"RUSSIAN GENERAL'S ENGAGEMENT OFF.

"The engagement of Gen. Pertelevitch Rogden, of the Russian General Staff, now in this country on a diplomatic mission, and Miss Berenice Patterson has been postponed indefinitely, according to an announcement made this afternoon by Miss Patterson. All details regarding the reason for this were refused, and General Rogden expressed the greatest surprise when informed that the announcement had been made."

With a little smile of satisfaction Brand replaced the paper where he had found it. Undoubtedly such a notice would not have been printed unless Berenice Patterson had been seen by some member of the s aff of the *News*. No paper would run such a risk of suit for libel without having the personal authority of one of the parties concerned. And although Berenice Patterson had been missing nearly a week, it was evident she was in the land of the living and could, therefore, be found.

Brand was about to pass on when another paper, projecting from a pocket in Rogden's vest, caught his eye. He drew it out and found it was a telegraph message which Rogden had evidently intended despatching when he went to the first floor of the hotel. The telegram was addressed to Victor Fein, Pennsylvania avenue and G treet, Washington, D. C., and was signed Rogden; but he whole of the message was made up of an incomprehensible jumble of words, which Brand realized at once was a cipher.

There was no time for him now to set to work solving it, and yet he must not remove the letter. So he went over to the bureau, and in a few moments had copied every word of the telegram on his cuffs, for there was no blank paper near at hand. He then replaced the letter where he had found it.

The bureau itself next claimed the attention of the investigator. Beyond the usual articles, it contained but one interesting feature. It was the framed photograph of a lovely young woman with great eyes that looked out at one with an expression of such trust and sadness that Brand was instantly impressed. He held the picture closer, but, look as sharply as he could, he could find no autograph at the bottom.

Brand turned from the contemplation of the picture to the body on the floor. In the position which he now held he could get a fair view of Rogden's inverted face. The urbane veneer which had covered it so cleverly in life was gone now; it had been cracked and scarred away by the rude hand of Death, and the cruelty of the hard lines at the mouth, the selfishness and the hardness were written on the countenance in unmistakable characters.

"Young lady," said Brand, addressing the picture in low tones, to the consternation of the hotel manager and his assistant in the doorway, "I congratulate you on a most fortunate escape."

The investigator then asked the manager to call a bellboy, and presently a red-haired, freckled-faced young man with a somewhat impudent smile saluted at the threshold.

"Go down to the areaway over which this window looks," said Brand, pointing to the open window. "See if there is any knife or other sharp weapon lying anywhere around."

The bellboy, proud to be on real detective work for once in his life, saluted and made a speedy departure. Brand too moved toward the door.

"If the young man returns with or without the knife, kindly detain him," he said to the hotel manager, and then they saw him walk down the corridor until he reached the steps, which he began mounting on tiptoe.

He did not remain long, but when they saw him reappear there was a relieved expression on his face, as if he had just settled something that had puzzled him sorely. He went to the elevator shaft and pressed the button. The Rembrandt has but one passenger elevator, and this soon glided to a rest at the seventh floor.

The operator was a sensible looking young man, and Brand did not beat about the bush with him a second.

"Who rode up with you to this floor during the last hour?" he asked.

"Only one person, sir."

"Who was that?"

"Well, sir, it was a woman."

"Young? Middle-aged? Old?"

"Well, sir, I should say as she was young, sir."

"Did you see her face?"

"Only through her veil, sir."

Brand asked the operator to follow him, and led him to Rogden's bureau.

"Did she look anything like that young lady?" asked the investigator.

"That's her!" quickly said the elevator man with conviction.

Voices in the hallway now apprised him his privacy was at an end. The men from headquarters were coming. Indeed, as he looked up, Brand saw John Slade and his assistant, Fuller, looking down at the body.

Slade grinned at the sight of his rival.

"Used your microscope and tape measure yet, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" he asked sarcastically.

"It hasn't been necessary, my dear fellow," answered Brand blithely. "The story of this crime is written all over the place here for any one who has eyes and brains in the same head. If you need me at the inquest let me know."

"Why don't you stay?" Slade invited with a sad attempt at condescension.

"Can't!" was Brand's laconic response. "I've got an appointment to meet a lady who may know more about this crime than the person who committed it. And I shouldn't be at all surprised if she rode to her place of appointment on a broomstick. Good-evening, gentlemen."

CHAPTER FOUR

A TRYST WITH A WITCH

BRAND had decided to keep the appointment which Rogden had with Laggis.

Glancing now at his watch, he found that he still had plenty of time to reach the Red Garter Café within the time stipulated. As he rode down in the elevator another morsel of information came to him. Evidently he had made a friend of the elevator man, and the latter, on the downward trip, said:

"The woman that I brought up to the seventh floor went to Mr. Rogden's door and knocked, but I don't know whether she was let in or not. I got called down to the main floor just at that time."

"Didn't you carry her down at any later time?" asked Brand.

The operator shook his head in vigorous negative, and Brand was forced to the conclusion that the mysterious veiled woman had walked the seven flights of stairs to the lobby, and thus escaped without attracting attention. The last person who had probably seen Rogden alive had gotten away. Still Brand consoled himself with the fact that the operator's identification of the picture on the bureau would aid in locating her.

Brand now called a taxicab and instructed the chauffeur to drive him to a point two blocks distant from the Red Garter Café. He would leave the machine there and approach his destination as cautiously as possible. As the car glided on its way down-town the investigator's mind grappled with all the tentacles of this monstrous mystery into which he had been suddenly thrown. He was forced to admit to himself that in his long career as a crime investigator, a career that had been marked with many brilliant successes, nothing that he had ever encountered had even approached this in its baffling and sensational features.

These questions Brand put to himself as he sat pondering in the shadows of the taxi:

Who was Laggis, the witch?

Why had she persecuted Pertelevitch Rogden?

How had she been able to accomplish her spell of twisting his ankle?

How had she been able to change the color of his hair?

By what means had she placed the blue triangle on his breast while he slept?

Why had Rogden been killed?

Who had killed him?

Was the woman who had knocked at his door the missing Berenice Patterson?

Why had she broken their engagement?

To these questions Brand found himself adding two others which the immediate future might soon settle: One was whether Laggis knew of Rogden's death. The other was whether she would keep her appointment, if she did know of it.

"At any rate," he reflected, the next fifteen minutes will settle those two and perhaps some of the others," and, glancing out of the window, he saw they were at the place where he intended leaving the machine. He paid the chauffeur and then stood on the corner for a moment to plan his method of approach. He would cross to the opposite side and walk slowly until he was directly across from the Red Garter Café. Then he would keep his eyes open for a queer old woman, or an automobile with a blue triangle on its door, or both.

So through the press of a noisy throng Brand made his way, jostling and being jostled, heedless of the music, the laughter and the lights of the whirling chaos of which he had become a part. Automatically his mind was busy, in all this push and jam, working away at the problem; fitting the parts of the jig-saw together and rejecting piece after piece of pure speculation which would not fit the facts at hand.

Presently he found himself at his appointed place. There was a cigar store near him and, entering this, he purchased a Havana, pausing leisurely to light it and taking time, meanwhile, to study the lay of the land. There was no sign of an automobile with a blue triangle on its door, although there were a great many machines parked near the sidewalk. An old woman was sweeping up some broken glass across the street, but she was so bent and feeble that Brand dismissed her as bearing no family relation to the witch he was after.

The Red Garter Café, a garish, noisy place, was just across the way. An electric sign, showing a woman kicking her foot against a hat held over her head and displaying a red garter in the process, made the place the most conspicuous of several such resorts in the block. Crowds were passing in and out constantly; indeed, the entire neighborhood was so busy about its own pleasure that Brand felt himself secure from observation.

In this he was completely, utterly, humiliatingly mistaken.

For some one seized him from behind in an iron grip. His arms were clamped to his sides, another pair of hands grabbed his legs, and Gordon Brand was a prisoner of men he could not see. No one clapped a hand over his mouth, but Brand would not cry out for help until he was actually being carried away; even at that sudden surprise he was alert enough to decide to wait a moment or two at least.

Then he saw the old woman with the broom across the street straighten up and move over toward him. She was Laggis, after all. Now she waved her broom toward him and whined:

"Brand! Brand! You of the cunning hand! Scratch me, snatch me, try to catch me, cunning Mr. Brand!"

It was a drawling, cattish voice, and though he was looking at the crone, who held her head bent low, the sound seemed to be coming from everywhere and nowhere. The investigator was a man of iron nerve, but the sight of this malevolent old hag did send a thrill down his spine.

"Laggis is lonely," she cried. "Laggis wants her mate. He did not come; he's bashful, sweet Rogden is. He sends the cunning Mr. Brand to do his wooing for him; but Brand won't do; he should have come himself. My third spell may teach him I stand no trifling; let him have it then, Laggis says, the spell of the poisoned hand!"

Her voice had grown acid with malice by this time. She glanced up the street and Brand saw a limousine of foreign design, an expensive car and new, approach her slowly. On its door was the sign of the blue triangle.

"Catch me! Catch me! Cunning Mr. Brand!" she whined, and the investigator struggled to free himself from the inexplicable grip of the men behind him; but there was no chance; he could not budge.

The car reached the side of the old woman and she made for it. Through the air she bounded, her broom trailing behind her in a fantastic resemblance to pictures Brand had seen in old books on witchcraft. She plunged into the darkness of the limousine, the chauffeur waited not a minute, and away dashed the car at defiant, break-neck speed.

At the same moment the grip on his arms and legs was released. Brand glanced behind him quickly and saw two stalwart men racing up the street. He let them race. He had thoughts only for the creature in the automobile. He wheeled quickly and tried to see the number of the license dangling from the rear.

With a gasp he read the figures—77,671.

That was the license of the machine he had left in his own garage—the license of Brand's private car.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FACE AT THE DOOR

IN another instant Brand had reached the taxi which he had ordered to be in waiting against just such an emergency.

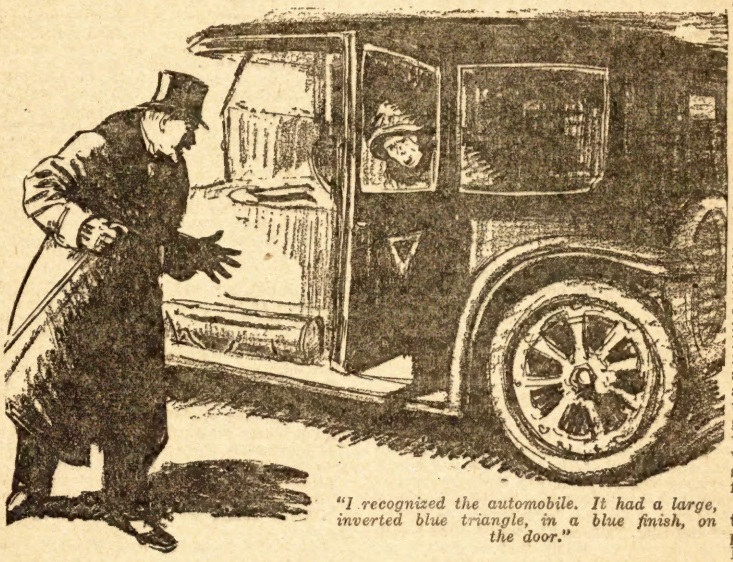
The witch's car was still in sight. He gave hurried

instructions to the chauffeur and they were off in swift pursuit. Away they dashed, eastward, to a busy avenue and then northward. The witch's car had gained a good lead and was doing its best to increase it. The devil himself might have been at the wheel, so reckless was the chauffeur's disregard for the rights of beast and man that got in his way. Brand's driver was scarcely more careful. Brand had warned him not to lose sight of that car, and he was doing his best to carry out orders.

Yet both he and Brand realized they were in a losing race. The witch was escaping because she had been given a moment's start, and because she was in a high-powered foreign car that could hold its own with any machine on Broadway, and could soon outstrip the little hired machine in which Brand had started to pursue.

Brand cursed himself for a fool for not having brought his own fast car there, and swore mightily when he wondered how his own license had been attached to the witch's limousine. One may be too careful at times, he told himself bitterly. He had had his own good reasons for leaving his car at home, but they could not atone for this defeat.

The automobile of Laggis turned into a cross-street, and when Brand's car turned the same corner, the fugitive machine had disappeared. They coursed down to the next corner, but no trace of the big limousine was to be found. Laggis had gotten away. She had won again, as she had won all along, and inwardly Brand stormed at his misfortune. It was as if it had been wisped off into invisible nothingness at the word of the sorceress.



"I recognized the automobile. It had a large, inverted blue triangle, in a blue finish, on the door."

But Brand was too wise a man to waste good, healthy brain tissue worrying over spilt milk. He realized that he was gradually becoming enmeshed in a most amazing series of puzzling events; conspiracies were being woven about him whose deeper significance he could only guess, and he realized that he must act instead of bemoaning his loss. Delay, he knew, might be very dangerous.

Accordingly, he resolved to waste no time. He told the chauffeur to stop while he consulted a directory, over which he pored for a few moments only. He found the address that he wanted—the home of Berenice Patterson—and he told the chauffeur to drive with all speed to the number on Garland avenue which the directory had given.

Then, reclining back on the leather cushions, Brand thought over the extraordinary series of events in which he had so recently played a big part. The chilling horror that he felt as he had looked upon Laggis was still over him, though in lessening measure. Her beady eyes still pierced his memory, and her mocking laughter rang in his ears.

Well, he had learned two important things as a result of this meeting: The first was the fact that, from all appearances, Laggis knew nothing whatever of the death of Rogden. Else why should she express disappointment at his absence and fasten upon him the fantastic curse of the poisoned hand? Of course Brand realized it might be a clever dodge upon her part to pretend ignorance, but remembering that it was she herself who had proposed the meeting, he was inclined to believe that she did not know that Rogden had been killed.

This raised another question in his mind. What had that eerie crying meant in Rogden's room before the door was opened and his body found? Whose voice had that been, if not Laggis'? For whoever Laggis was, however effective and devilish the evil wishes she put upon persons, Brand was convinced it was not she who was behind that door in the Rembrandt Hotel when Rogden died.

The other fact which seemed significant to Brand was that Laggis had instantly recognized him. In her wild, queer way she had even extemporized in witch's jingle and rhyme for him: "Brand! Brand! With a cunning hand! Scratch me, snatch me, try to catch me, cunning Mr. Brand!" The investigator smiled in grim amusement at the queer doggerel. The whole thing was so absurdly baffling.

These reflections, which passed through Brand's mind while his taxi was speeding northward to the outermost limits of the city, convinced him of one vitally important thing. In this game which he was playing he was facing the most dangerous kind of enemy—one with imagination. Whoever Laggis might be, witch or devil-woman or merely a clever actress, she had undoubtedly imagination; she had brains, she had audacity and most unquestionably she had a motive which drove her to such extraordinary conduct. That motive, Brand was forced to admit to himself, appeared unfathomable. But these facts, he said to himself, were clear enough:

Pertelevitch Rogden, whether he had been a good man or a bad man, had come to him as a client seeking his professional skill and advice. And Pertelevitch Rogden had been murdered. Berenice Patterson had been Rogden's fiancée, and Berenice Patterson was missing. Brand made up his mind that before he gave up on this case he would track down the one who drove the knife into Rogden's throat, and that he would restore this beautiful girl to her home.

Glancing out of the taxi window, he saw that they were far up-town, and drawing close to their destination.

He began to plan what he would say when he presently should find himself facing the relatives, perhaps the parents, of the missing girl. Most certainly he must proceed with the utmost caution. He determined to try to find out the real feelings of the family toward Rogden as quickly as possible, and he was formulating a plan to establish this by a quick question that would take them off their guard.

The car lurched to the curb a few feet distant from a row of new houses which were being erected and which were now mere shells of brick. As Brand got out and looked around him he perceived the probable object of his search on the other side of the street. It was a very stately dwelling, not at all like the houses one comes across in these days. It had been built in the colonial fashion, and was probably quite old. It sat back in a yard in which there were trees, and there was an iron railing in front. The entire place had an air of innate refinement on the decline, as if evil times had overtaken its inhabitants.

Behind one window on the first floor a light was gleaming. The rest of the house was in darkness. Brand paused at the gate, but no sign of life came from any other part of the house. The light, however, encouraged him; he felt sure he would find some member of the family at home, and he was quite certain of his ability to make them talk.

He rang the bell and waited. After a little while he heard a stirring behind the curtained glass doors, and then a light flared up in the hallway. The door was opened quickly and a girl, who kept herself back in the shadows, asked him what he wished.

"I should like to talk to some member of the family," said Brand gently. "I want to talk to some one about the disappearance of Miss Berenice Patterson."

"Then you may see me," replied the young woman coldly. "I am Berenice Patterson."

Brand bent forward and then saw her face clearly. It was the girl whose picture he had seen on Rogden's bureau.

CHAPTER SIX

"I WILL NOT TELL!"

BRAND had felt it, subconsciously, the moment she had opened the door.

His mind had refused to believe it. His mind had insisted it was impossible; that she must be a sister, a cousin, or some other relative, but not Berenice Patterson herself. Now Brand's subconscious intuition was telling his mind to attend to its own business in the future.

"You are Miss Berenice Patterson?" asked Brand with a relieved note in his voice. "Well, that is good news, indeed! We all thought you were kidnaped. Forgive me, I must introduce myself. I am Gordon Brand, a private investigator, and your fiancé, Mr. Rogden, was——"

He got no further. The girl was swaying, staggering, clutching at the handle of the door. Brand leaped to her side and caught her as she was falling. She was not unconscious, but weakness had overcome her; she could not stand.

In his strong arms Brand caught her, lifted her and carried her across the wide hallway and into a big parlor, with its antique furnishings and its blazing hearth fire. With the gentlest care he placed her on a wide lounge, and then reached in his pocket for a vial of restorative which long experience in his profession had taught him was often needed.

Berenice Patterson stared at him in a sort of dumb, utter helplessness, a kind of dispassionate misery that cut the usually unemotional Brand to the heart. There seemed to be an oppression hanging over the room which he could not understand; a restraint, an influence, of which he did not know, but which he felt to the core. He followed the slowly turning eyes of the girl and then he partially, at least, understood.

There were two figures at the fireside. One was a very old woman, very stout, who sat mumbling and jabbering to herself at one corner of the ruddy hearth. Opposite her sat the giant, misshapen figure of a man. He was bent low, and his huge, gnarled hands were spread out like star-fish, eager to be warmed. As the dancing flames played hide-and-seek in shadows over his face he much resembled a familiar demon gloating at the fireside. His eyes were gazing deep into the heart of the fire, as if in that old-fashioned blaze he saw things no mortal could see. Every now and then he shuddered and chuckled in hideous merriment.

Almost mechanically, and quite rudely, Brand asked: "Who is this man?"

The girl started, as she always seemed to do when spoken to, and then replied:

"This is Mr. Graffery. Mr. Graffery, this is Mr. Brand. And this is my mother, Mr. Brand."

The old woman paid no attention to the introduction, but continued talking to herself in low and confidential tones. Graffery, on the contrary, turned with haste and bowed in a servile politeness that would deceive no one. He spoke no word, and returned instantly to his old position, rubbing his hands as if they had grown colder in their momentary absence from the blaze.

Brand determined to ignore Graffery for the present. He turned again to the reclining girl, and noted with satisfaction that, though her pallor was still deadly, she seemed now to have more self-possession and repose.

"Miss Patterson," he said kindly, "the last thing in the world that I wish to do is to distress or annoy you. However, my visit here is entirely professional, and I wish you to understand that any assistance that you can give me now, however small, may be of incalculable value in the work that I have set out to do. Therefore, if you will try to be strong enough and brave enough to answer some of my questions, I shall be very grateful to you."

To Brand's surprise, the girl looked questioningly across the room at the gaunt, hunchbacked man at the fireside. Though the investigator could not see, and disdained to turn around, he felt that Graffery had made a signal of permission. The girl turned her gaze back to Brand and asked him wearily what he wished to know.

"Do you know what has happened to Mr. Rogden?" he asked quietly.

She stiffened slightly at the question. Her eyes took on a brighter gleam, and her fingers picked at her dress. Her murmured answer was almost inaudible, but Brand understood that it was an affirmative.

"How did you learn about it?" was Brand's next question. His voice was very easy, and calculated to arouse the girl's confidence and drive away her evident suspicion.

Again the inquiring look shone in her eyes as she turned them to the strange being brooding at the hearth. And again he apparently signaled his permission, for she lifted her tired eyes to Brand and answered:

"The police have been here talking to Graffery. They thought I might know of his relatives."

"When did you return home?" Brand's voice was very persuasive now.

"An hour ago."

"And where had you been?"

The question, asked as coolly, with as little interest as Brand could feign, produced an extraordinary effect upon the girl. She sat erect, the blood flushing back to her white cheeks, her brows lifted in haughty defiance.

"I will not tell!" she said, and there was a hard note, new to her voice, as she spoke.

The answer seemed to galvanize the moody, doddering Graffery. With a fierce snarl he glided from his chair and limped slinking across the room until he stood menacingly, the deformed specter of the spirit of malice, in the center of the floor. One threatening arm he raised, and shook his fist at Berenice.

"Yes, you will, my daisy!" he bellowed. "You tight-mouthed blatherskite! You'll tell *me*, you will!"

He paused, angry at himself for having allowed his temper to master him, and retreated back to his chair. The white-haired old woman paid no attention, but continued her tirade to herself uninterrupted.

Brand now studied Graffery boldly and with unconcealed ill favor. He turned to gaze at him deliberately.

"Who is this fellow?" he asked of Berenice. "Is he any relation to you?"

There was a threat in Brand's voice as he spoke which warned Graffery he was in no mood to bear trifling. But this attitude served only to antagonize the man and aggravate his surly bad humor. He bounded to his feet again and shook his fist at Brand.

"You get out of here!" he shouted. "I'm master here, that's what I am. I'm her guardeen, that's who *I* am, and this is my house. You get out of here before I call the police on you. We don't answer no questions of yours. We deal with authorities, not with dead men's friends."

"Is what this man says true, Miss Patterson?" asked Brand incredulously.

"It is true. I wish you would go," she replied coldly.

"Then you wish to give me no information which will assist me in finding who murdered Pertelevitch Rogden?" persisted Brand.

"We don't care *who* killed him!" raged Graffery, while the girl, lifting her hands to her face, sobbed hysterically. Brand realized he could hope to learn no more from here. With a long glance at Graffery he turned and found his own way to the door. He told the chauffeur to drive him back to his offices down-town. And Brand was more thoughtful than ever on the return journey.

The investigator's offices were located on the first floor of an old dwelling that had been converted into an office building. The surroundings appealed to Brand far more than the conventional suites found in modern skyscrapers.

It was close upon eleven o'clock when the investigator alighted on the sidewalk in front of this building and said good-night to the chauffeur. He noticed that another machine was standing near by, and wondered if a client had tried to find him in his consulting-rooms so late at night.

He mounted the brown-stone steps and searched in his pocket for the key. As he did so a figure stepped from the shadows of the vestibule. The figure had passed him before he could recover from his surprise. It was a tall, queenly woman.

Two families rented the third floor of this building, and so Brand had no right to stop or question this woman. But he could not refrain from turning and watching her. She did not appear to be at all disturbed at the encounter. She approached the waiting car and then turned with a lithe, graceful movement and threw something to the steps. It rattled at Brand's feet.

He stooped and grabbed it and held it up so that the light of a street lamp played full upon it. It was a long, sharp knife, and it was stained with blood.

"The murderer's weapon!" Brand exclaimed involuntarily, and made a dash for the woman who had thrown it. But he was too late; she was in the machine, and it was speeding away.

But he was not left in doubt. As he stared helplessly at the escaping car a face came to the window, and he saw and understood.

It was the leering, triumphant face of Laggis.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CURSE OF THE POISONED HAND

BRAND did not let his disappointment at the second escape of Laggis overcloud his satisfaction at the kindness she had done him. For he did not doubt that the knife in his hand was the one with which Rogden's life had been ended.

He locked himself in his private office, with only the green shaded light over his desk turned on. In front of him he placed all his relics of this extraordinary case—the lock of Rogden's hair, the blue triangle, the cuffs containing the copy of the cipher telegram he had taken from Rogden's pocket and the dagger which had just been so strangely given into his possession.

The cipher telegram first engaged his attention. It read as follows:

"MR. VICTOR FEIN,
"Pennsylvania avenue and G street,
"Washington, D. C.
"Your me agsee entsto in for once mati on at entirely come wrong to I you always advise scorned suspicion. ROGDEN."

Now Brand prided himself on his skill at solving cryptograms and codes. It had been a specialty with him since the day that he had read Poe's description of the processes by which the frequency of recurring letters could be made to unravel the message. Here, however, there was no such means at hand. It was immediately evident that this message would not lend itself to any such means of detection, because it did not, evidently, depend on any key for a system of the arrangement of words and syllables which would blind the uninitiated as to their meaning. With this came the joyful conviction that, if it took all night, it could be done.

Though he felt certain that if he could find the proper way of reading those syllables the message would become immediately clear, Brand had a hard time finding that way. After an hour of hard trying he dropped it for a moment and decided to give his mind a rest from the subject, meanwhile devoting his attention to a study of the knife.

It was a new hunting knife, and seemingly had never been used before. Brand studied the blade, the hilt, the little plate on the handle which gave the name of the dealer, and the blood stains. Then, with a new idea stirring in his head, he turned his attention to the cryptogram.

"Eureka!" he cried suddenly. "I've got it!"

And, in fact, he had. First he had found that by skipping certain words and syllables he got sense and meaning out of part of the message, but that the other part remained meaningless. Then he had tried reading backwards, also skipping, and the riddle was solved.

"There is the message!" he told himself exultingly. "Now we're getting somewheres, at least. What a clever little scheme. 'Your agent's information entirely wrong. I always scorned suspicion. Advise you to come at once to see me.' The strange message that Rogden never lived to send."

Quietly Brand stood in thought for a moment, then he sat down and scribbled rapidly on a sheet of paper. He first copied the telegram in plain characters, so that a telegrapher would have no difficulty in reading it. To this he signed Rogden's name. Then he addressed another to Victor Fein also. This was the second message, Brand's own to Fein:

"Better leaving come am at I once hurry to-night me enemy stunned tried merely to and kill off me glanced but blow."

And to this Brand also signed Rogden's name. Within five more minutes he had reached a telegraph office, and was arranging to have the cipher message, with its addition, put on the wire at once. Then Brand returned to his office and bent low again over the curious collection of article on his desk.

When Enid Starr, the lovely secretary of the investigator, reached the offices the next morning she found Brand asleep in an arm-chair. At the half-opened door of his inner sanctum she stood and gazed upon him sleeping, and her expression would have interested any one to have seen. There was a mothering tenderness in her look, as if she would reprove him for not having gone to his bed, and there was a timid air about her, too, as if she did not understand the emotions that were working in her own heart.

Enid could not have told you why she felt so sad as she looked upon the tired Brand, slouched wearily in his arm-chair. She did not know. She gave a little sigh and turned back to her own desk in the outer office. There was a batch of mail waiting, and over these she soon became engrossed.

As she had expected, Brand was soon awake. His hair rumpled, and his entire appearance somewhat amusingly disarranged, he came to the doorway and greeted her merrily.

"Caught me napping, didn't you, Enid?" he cried laughingly. "By George, I hadn't an idea it was so late as all this. I've got a pile of work cut out for me to-day. I've run afoul of the greatest case in my history, and if I don't look out I'm going to be licked. Did you read about Rogden in the papers?"

Enid's shocked face showed how realistic the newspaper accounts had been of the murder, but Brand was not anxious to see the papers just then.

"I've been here all night trying to figure the thing out," he rattled on. "No, I haven't, but I'm going to. It just won't figure out yet. Now, Enid, while I am making my morning ablutions, as it were, I wish you would do several things for me. First, call up Paddy MacPortland and tell him I want him down here in a hurry. Then get hold of young Burns and Russell and ask them to report also as soon as they can. I will need all those men this morning. Then call the Little Florence restaurant down the street and ask them to send me up a man's breakfast—quick. I'm darn near starved to death; and if you're real good, Enid, I'll give you a bite of my roll. And—oh, yes, Enid! Before you do anything else please call the morgue. Ask them if Rogden's body is there, and if any one has put in a claim for it beside the coroner. Do that first. It's important."

With his hearty laugh Brand disappeared from the door and was soon splashing and carrying on at the washstand in his laboratory. He was in high, good humor. All the grim horror of the events of the evening before had been overcome by his youthful ardor and enthusiasm, which had returned with the morning. There was the old, unflinching, devil-may-care glint of conquest in his steel-blue eyes. And, like a battle horse, he was eager and impatient to be at his work, the work which he had toilsomely, painstakingly mapped out for himself as he had sat alone all night in the darkness of his office.

He heard Enid's low, sweet voice asking the questions in the telephone. Then he heard her give a shocked little expression and hang up the receiver. She came rushing to him with fear all over her face.

"Mr. Brand," she cried, "this is horrible!"

"What?" he urged.

"They say no one has claimed the body at the morgue; but they say his right hand has suddenly shriveled and withered away!"

Like a flash Brand remembered. He recalled the hard, set malice in the voice of Laggis, the witch, on the night before; he remembered how she had hissed that another spell might teach Rogden a lesson. Laggis had put a curse on Rogden—the curse of the poisoned hand, and it had run its way, even though the hand was that of a dead man.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHERE THE TRAIL BEGINS

WITH a quick revulsion of feeling, all the horror he had experienced the night before again possessed Brand, and his face reflected to his astonished secretary the emotions which mastered him.

"Horrible is right," he replied, repeating her word. "This is beginning to be inconceivable. It looks like real witchcraft."

To Enid the fact of Rogden's withering hand was only a distressing detail in the day's routine, and so she did not understand the evident excitement of her employer. Brand could not help but feel, though he tried to tell himself it was foolish, that some eerie influence of the supernatural had made itself manifest in this extraordinary phenomenon.

"It looks like real witchcraft," he repeated.

"How do you mean, Mr. Brand?" inquired Enid curiously.

"He asked me yesterday, here in this room, if I believed in witchcraft. I told you how his hair turned gray. The woman who had pursued him with her masquerade threatened him with the curse of the poisoned hand, as she called it; and it has come to be, just as she said. When he asked me if I believed in witchcraft I laughed at him; I almost told him he needed the attention of a psychiatric specialist. To-day I am almost as ready to ask the same question myself. I wonder if, after all, there is such a thing possible as for a rabid, sinful old woman to sell her soul to the devil, and by virtue of that infernal bargain be given unnatural powers?"

"Mr. Brand!"

Enid's voice was accusing, and had in it a challenge which stung the investigator to the quick.

"Witches! You, the man of iron nerve, talking of witches. I'm surprised at you, Mr. Brand! You should not sleep in a chair all night; you need a doctor this moment."

The girl was severely, yet almost tenderly, reproachful. She looked at Brand with such hauntingly lovely eyes that, involuntarily, he made a step forward. In an instant she had made him forget Laggis and all her spells. It was only by a strong effort of his will that he prevented himself from snatching her into his arms and telling her he loved her.

But just at that moment Paddy MacPortland made his entrance. He was a tousel-headed young Celt who was Brand's most valuable and trusted assistant, and whose bravery in the face of fighting odds had been many times made plain. He came in, cap in hand, and made Enid and Brand a deep, flourishing bow.

"Top o' the marnin'," he said breezily. "And it's a fine colleen ye've got fer a secretary to-day, Mr. Brand."

Enid smiled, for the young fellow's hearty good humor was irresistible, and Brand too could not help smiling with her. As Enid left the room, however, the investigator turned and said briskly:

"This is your busy day, Mac, old boy. You haven't any time to spare. Is your motorcycle outside? Good! Have you read the morning papers?"

"About the murder of the old Russian bloke? That I have."

"Well, you've got to work on one angle of that case, Mac, and you mustn't fail me. There is a big humpbacked old crab living in a big house on Garland avenue—I'll give you the address in a moment—who is mixed up in this Rogden business, but I haven't been able to dope out just how so far. That's what I want you for. I want you to go up to that house and watch. If this old humpback—Graffery's his name—comes out, follow him wherever he goes. If a young lady should come out before him, then follow her instead. If he enters the house while you're watching, stick to your post, and follow him if he comes out again. By nightfall, if nothing has happened, I will send Russell up to relieve you.

"But mind, now, Mac, this is important. I want an accurate description of whoever enters or leaves that house. And if Graffery or Berenice Patterson leave that house, I want one of them trailed wherever they go. I will arrange for Russell to stop by every hour or so, and if he has anything to report, he can telephone Miss Starr; she will know how to get in touch with me."

"Is that all, boss?" queried Mac with military brevity.

"That's all, Mac."

"Then, 'aw-river' till you see me," shot back Mac, and made a characteristic, hasty dash for the door. He nearly collided with Enid, who was just entering with Brand's breakfast on a tray. With a spluttered excuse he escaped, and Brand looked after him with a pleased smile.

"A comer!" he told Enid. "A boy who will make his

mark in this game. You will watch that fellow go right up the ladder, Enid. He's made of the right stuff, is Mac. Somehow, I seem to have a happy faculty of gathering around me people who make good and who become my friends, rather than mere employees. Look at yourself, for instance!"

Enid, blushing a little, bent lower as she daintily rearranged the dishes on the tray.

"How long have you been with me?" he persisted, secretly pleased at her embarrassment.

"Just about six months," replied Enid with a rosy smile.

"Six months! Is that all? Well, by George, you seem to know as much about the detective business now as I do. Some day you are going to be a wonderful woman investigator, and make the Brand Agency famous."

They heard voices in the outer office, and Enid, glad to escape Brand in his present mood, went out to see who was there. Burns and Russell, two other of Brand's staff of assistants, had reported for duty.

To Russell, Brand rapidly explained the assistance he was expected to give Mac in his observation work on Garland avenue. Then he turned to Burns.

"I wish you would devote all your energies," he said, "to finding out the private history of the Patterson family that is now involved in the Rogden murder case. I want to know who the humpbacked fellow up there, who goes by the name of Graffery, is and where he came from. I want to know all about their financial condition, and every detail you can possibly learn about their private business. Get as much as you can."

Burns and Russell left at once, and Brand turned to Enid with a pleased smile.

"There will be important messages here from Washington before I return," he said. "I shall be at the Hotel Rembrandt practically all morning. Do not read me those messages over the telephone; simply hold them here until I return. But if you get any messages from Mac, call up and tell Colonel Blackstone or the manager that you want to talk to me, and they will attend to it. And, Enid, look out for witches!"

Long afterward he remembered her joyous smile as he waved good-by and left the office.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CREATURE THAT WALKS UPSIDE-DOWN

BRAND went first to the morgue.

Two minutes after he had arrived he was bending over the body of Pertelevitch Rogden. In this second examination Brand was just as thorough, if not more so, than he had been on the previous evening. Again he devoted the most careful attention to the wound in the neck. He studied it with the minute scrutiny that betokened how much importance he attached to its size, its nature and its position.

Having satisfied his mind of some doubts which had arisen since he had seen the body, he now turned to behold the miracle of the shriveled hand. It was surely a miracle, and more. The hand was rapidly being eaten away to the bone; it was a fearful sight to look upon. Brand wondered secretly what the two stalwart police on guard would think, say and do if they knew the real story of this withered hand.

His mind busy with a score of questions which grew more puzzling as he turned them over and over, he left the morgue and boarded an elevated car for up-town. There were mysteries enough unsolved about the affair, altogether apart from the machinations of Laggis, to keep his thoughts occupied every moment of the journey; but most of these puzzling details he hoped to clear up by a morning's work in the Rembrandt rooms, and a theory of the crime, needing confirmation from sources to which he had already despatched his agents, was already adjusting itself in his brain.

But in no scheme of events which he could arrange would Laggis fit as a rational human being with a rational motive. Her very name began to anger him, because of the insistent repetition of it in his musings.

Colonel Hamilton Blackstone, the white-mustached, langourously charming proprietor of the Rembrandt, received him with the utmost graciousness. Like every one else, the colonel had heard of Brand's exploits. But there was something far from the usual air to which Brand was accustomed in the colonel's greeting. There was a suave restraint in his manner, a condescending desire to assist, which irritated Brand, and served to puzzle and annoy him. Before he had talked with him five minutes about the crime Brand was certain that Colonel Blackstone knew something which he had fully made up his mind to keep to himself. And the colonel was so entirely certain that Brand would not find out what he knew, that he meant to be as charming and hospitable as he could be. He asked only one question:

"Whom do you represent in this little investigation of yours, my dear Mr. Brand?" was his inquiry.

"Rogden!" answered Brand sharply. "Rogden was my client. The police may go their way, and luck to them. They will not work with me—you know their jealousy of the private investigator—so I play a lone hand. I get no fee. I intend to fulfil the promises I made not twenty-four hours ago in my office to Rogden. That's why I am here."

Colonel Blackstone puffed languidly on his big, black cigar, and seemed to applaud Brand's sentiments with wide, symmetrical rings of smoke which he sent aviating gracefully toward the ceiling.

"I understand, Mr. Brand," he assured, with that half-revealed air of patronage which Brand found so annoying. "Go right ahead. You may remain in Rogden's room as long as you please, and I will arrange that you will not be interrupted unless, of course, the police want to get in."

Brand could have asked for no more. Yet the underlying significance of the colonel's manner had impressed him perhaps far out of proportion of its real importance. But Brand felt convinced there was something vital back of it. Brand was a practical man, but he was not such a fool as to disregard those vague impressions which are most likely the promptings of our higher intelligence. There had been nothing in Colonel Blackstone's manner that he could single out as significant in itself, and yet he had gotten the impression that the colonel had information which he was holding back. So Brand decided to distrust the colonel and to analyze his every move, so far as those moves could possibly affect the point at issue.

After a graceful adieu to the old fellow Brand took the elevator to the seventh floor and went at once to the fatal room. A policeman guarded the door, a totally useless proceeding which Brand at once recognized as the fine handiwork of the remarkable Slade. The bluecoat made no difficulty about Brand passing him, and the investigator soon found himself alone and unhampered, free to work his own will now in the chamber of death.

He lost no time in verifying some important points on which the structural theory he was forming was gradually being reared. A quick glance had reassured him on one point: he wanted to be certain this room contained only one door. And there was only one door—the one which opened on the corridor. The room communicated with no other.

"Then," said Brand to himself, "with windows looking out upon a sheer drop of seven stories, with the door locked and the key in Rogden's pocket, he was murdered. And though I did not lose sight of that room, I heard a woman's voice behind that door; and when we opened that door there wasn't any woman there."

The theory had occurred to Brand that some one had been lowered to the windowsill by a rope from the floor above, but he soon dismissed this, because there would have been no time for any one to have escaped that way without being observed by some one in the street below. It would have required a person of very exceptional

skill and daring to maneuver an entrance through the small window while dangling over such an abyss; and with the added danger of being seen, Brand felt reasonably secure in dismissing that theory as untenable until all others had been exhausted.

An examination of the windowsill also served to confirm his reasoning. There was not the slightest trace there to indicate that some one had rested there, which it would have been necessary to do, if entrance had been gained in such a spectacular manner as Brand was considering.

The investigator stepped back and threw himself into an easy-chair beside the bed. There must be clues in this room, he told himself. No crime, such as the murder of Pertelevitch Rogden, could have been committed without the assailant leaving some damning trace behind. In this room, Brand was certain, there were leads and threads, clues and traces, fine, small, infinitely delicate, eluding the eyes of the idly curious, but nevertheless there for those who had eyes to see. Wearily he passed his hand over his forehead and stared vacantly at the ceiling.

Then he started up in his chair, galvanized at the sight that met his gaze. On the ceiling over his head, barely discernible, almost obscured by the twisted curl of the paper design, were two marks in the dust. They were footprints—small, sharp footprints on the ceiling.

Some one had walked upside-down in the room where Rogden had been killed.

CHAPTER TEN

MAC KEEPS HIS EYES OPEN

PADDY MacPORTLAND was in his glory.

This youthful disciple of Gordon Brand was never so happy as when he was despatched on some important mission where there were prospects of danger, opportunities for sleuthing, and chances for winning the most coveted honor that Mac could wish to receive—a word of praise from his chief. In his boyish, wholehearted way he had made Brand an idol; he studied his methods with an almost absurd reverence for the smallest details, and his greatest ambition in life was to see the day that his name was placed beneath Brand's on the frosted glass of the office outer door. Mac wanted to be a partner in Brand's Agency.

But even to his youthful and optimistic fancy, that day seemed far distant on the morning that, after barely missing a mix-up with Enid and her breakfast tray, he mounted his motorcycle on the street outside. During the journey northward to Garland avenue he mapped out his plans. He knew the neighborhood fairly well, and he was certain he could find some convenient post of observation from which he could watch without being watched, and where, at the same time, he could arrange to confer with Russell, who would be coming around for a report within an hour or so.

As he had expected, Mac did not have much difficulty in selecting his post. Having located the imposing old dwelling of the Pattersons for the last three generations, and having assured himself by casual questioning of a woman behind the counter of a small store near the corner, he cast about for a place for himself. He found it in a temporary shelter-house built in front of a large new house in course of construction, and diagonally opposite the house he meant to watch. The half-completed mansion was evidently intended to be a magnificent affair, but for some reason work seemed to have been stopped on it.

"Scarcity of labor due to the war," Mac told himself. "Well, for once, I'm obliged to the war and the scarcity of labor for helpin' me out, begorra!"

There was not even a watchman about, and the shelter-house, thrown together of loose boards for the protection and convenience of the laborers, was deserted.

Mac promptly assumed an air of importance, as if he were connected with the erection of this dwelling in some vital way, and had, therefore, a right to the shelter of this house without asking questions of any one. It had begun to get cloudy as he left Brand's office, and now a few rain-drops were falling, which made his selection of the shelter-house all the more desirable. But before he entered the house Mac made a careful inspection of the masonry on the foundation of the new house, as if he feared there had been careless work done there; he prowled around for a little while longer, and then glanced at his watch as if he had an appointment here with the owner or the builder or some one else equally important, and he wished he would hurry up. Then he went in the little shelter-house and sat down on a box.

Through the one small, rude window of the shack he had a perfect view of the house across the way, and yet the dingy glass protected him from prying eyes. If a man had entered the Patterson house, Mac would have seen him; if one had come out, Mac would have seen him. He could have kept the departing one in sight through that window until it would have been safe for him to follow; but neither any one entering or leaving the house would have noticed the young assistant of Gordon Brand unless they had known he was there in the first place, and then had gone to look for him.

An hour passed very quickly, with no sign of life from the house. Watching a place where a huge ogre, suspected of being connected with a sensational murder mystery, and a beautiful girl, the ex-fiancée of the murdered man, are known to be has its thrills to the beginner at the game; but to one of Mac's experience the unexciting minutes that followed each other in such a long, unbroken succession soon grew very monotonous. The wiry little Irishman, as alert and vigorous as ever human being got to be, was very uncomfortable at the end of that hour.

He got down from his barrel and walked around his narrow hiding-place to get the kinks out of his muscles; he lighted cigarette after cigarette, and used up his entire repertoire of cuss words before two hours had gone by. There was still no sign from across the way. When he was about to despair of anything happening, and just about the time when he had begun to look for young Russell to appear, something did occur that riveted all his attention.

An old-fashioned barouche, drawn by two black horses, rattled up with a great deal of lurching and rumbling in front of the iron gate of the house across the way. The coachman attracted Mac's attention at once. He was a tremendous man, with bristling red whiskers completely surrounding his cheeks and chin. He looked like a stage anarchist, and Mac recognized him at once as a jehu who had a night stand down-town. His manner was always aggressively important, even when he was looking for fares, and now he carried himself as if the business of the world were weighing on his huge shoulders.

A very different type of individual stepped out of the carriage when it stopped. He looked far less important than his red-whiskered coachman. He was a shriveled, dried-up, weazened-faced old man, very foppish in his attire. He wore a high silk hat and a stylish spring overcoat, and he swung a gold-headed cane with a great deal of jauntiness as he made his way mincingly up the graveled path and rang the door-bell. Somehow, he reminded Mac of the newspaper cartoons of a prominent millionaire.

The waiting young investigator saw the old man admitted very quickly, but he was not able to catch a glimpse of who opened the door. He settled himself for a long wait now, and was debating whether it would be good policy to try to engage "Red Whiskers," as Mac had mentally dubbed him, in conversation. But things developed with more speed than he had expected. Hardly had the door slammed behind the old man than Mac observed Russell approaching briskly down the street. This was Mac's cue. He walked carelessly out from his hiding-place and stood boldly on the curb.

Russell, though a newcomer to Brand's force, had re-

ceived an excellent schooling already, and he played his part well. He walked up to the red-whiskered coachman and asked him for a match. The latter told him gruffly that he wasn't a match store. Russell gave him a genuinely American invitation in reply, and crossed the street to where Mac was waiting. And Mac obligingly gave him a match.

"I've picked up something," Russell whispered as he bent over to light his cigarette. "One of the headquarter's men just wised me up. The police are coming up here to arrest Berenice Patterson on the charge of killing Rogden. Why didn't the chief work on that angle? The police are hot after her, they tell me."

"Well, they'd better hurry up, begob!" exclaimed Mac in a low tone of smothered surprise. "Will ye just look at that, now!"

The young men gazed across to the house of the Pattersons. They saw Graffery and the little old man emerging, supporting a strange burden between them. Pale and scarcely able to stand, Berenice Patterson was being almost forcibly carried down the steps.

They placed her in the rear seat of the conveyance; Graffery and the little old man sat on either side of her, and then the red-whiskered coachman cracked his whip. The horses dashed off furiously down the street.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AND THEN PLUNGES IN

MAC lost no time now.

"I've got my motorcycle here," he told Russell excitedly. "Tell the boss I'm on the job, and I'll stick behind that red-whiskered bloke if he drives from here to Jericho!"

Before the words had left his lips he was astride his machine, and a second later, gathering more speed with every revolution of the wheels, he was racing eastward in sharp pursuit of the mysterious carriage and its extraordinary occupants.

The carriage was now two blocks away, and the horses were being whipped to their best speed; but the speeding motorcycle very quickly brought Mac dangerously near fast enough to keep him close to the barouche.

Mac realized that he was up against an unusually difficult problem. for at any moment he might be recognized as a suspicious individual by those he was following, and then his usefulness might be ended. The streets in this far northern extremity of the city were little traveled, and a motorcycle, jogging continuously behind a carriage, when it would be such an easy matter for it to pass and outdistance the horses, would soon attract attention. The young investigator prayed, therefore, that the journey would be short.

In this he was not disappointed. He rejoiced when presently it became apparent that the destination of those in the carriage was to be near the brink of the river, for they passed avenue after avenue in their progress eastward. But Mac's rejoicing was speedily ended when he understood the real object.

The carriage drew up at a place where the pavement became a straggling brick walk that suddenly lost itself in a muddy path leading down to a rude wharf. Beside this wharf, bobbing up and down restlessly, was a small row-boat.

A square distant from where his quarry had halted Mac bent low over his motor, as if he had encountered engine trouble all at once. He pointed the nose of his machine southward, as if he were bound into the city, and he paid no attention whatsoever, so far as outward appearances were concerned, to those he was following. But in reality he was watching them with all his vigilance at a tension.

Graffery and the little old man stepped out of the carriage, and Graffery pursed his lips and gave a long whistle. Immediately another man scrambled from the row-boat up on the wharf and came toward them. Like the coachman, he was very tall and very broad, and he walked with the swash-buckling cloak and sword air of a highwayman. With a sweeping movement of his right arm he saluted Graffery and his companion, and the three gathered in an earnest little group, talking rapidly.

Then the newcomer walked over to the carriage, where Berenice Patterson lay reclining back on the cushions, apparently resigned to whatever had been arranged. He lifted the girl in his arms and walked toward the wharf as if his burden were lighter than a babe. He reached the edge of the wharf, where, without undue tenderness, he laid her down on the rough, wet boards while he got back into the row-boat. Then Mac watched his huge hands and wrists reappear above the wharf edge, reach and clutch the girl, as if an Old Man of the Sea had come up out of the brine for another victim.

Graffery and his antique companion now followed, the latter seemingly making a great to-do about soiling his clothes in making the not easy maneuver of getting into the boat. Through it all the red-whiskered coachman sat sullenly on the driver's box, reins in hand. Finally, as the little old man's coattails disappeared from view, the coachman seemed to rouse from his lethargy. In some foreign tongue, which Mac could not identify, he called out something to those in the boat vociferously, and to Mac it seemed angrily.

A roar of answering gibberish came from the boat, apparently from the man who had carried Berenice Patterson there. Back and forth they shouted to one another, the red-whiskered man growing more threatening and defiant every moment, and the giant's voice rising from the boat like an irritated steam whistle. Mac longed to know what they were talking about, but he could not understand a single word. He felt very sorry for the beautiful girl who was now a prisoner in the hands of such a choice lot as this.

At last some conciliatory words from the giant seemed to mollify the red-whiskered man. He touched his whip to the heads of his black horses, they turned and the carriage rumbled past Mac as it went back. The coachman saw Mac bending over his motorcycle and seemed to recognize him. Mac wondered if he remembered having seen him in front of the house on Garland avenue. At any rate, he realized that the look the red-whiskered man gave him was far from pleasant. And Mac confided to himself that if ever a villain drove a horse, it was that fur-faced old pirate.

It now became necessary for Mac to approach closer to the scene of operations. In his present position he was too far away to keep track of those in the boat. Accordingly, he now looked around, as if searching for some one who could help him with the machine, and moving all the time closer to the river front. Finally he reached an embankment from which he could gaze directly down upon the boat and its strange passengers.

Graffery had seized the oars. He looked like an ugly old buzzard as he bent low and dipped his oars, while the big man drew up the anchor and untied the line from the wharf. Berenice Patterson was crouched in a little heap on the rear seat, her face covered with her hands. And mounting guard over her misery was the sleek, watchful old man.

The boat was moving out into midstream. His task done, the big man drew his hand over his eyes, shading them while he looked up the river, his head bent forward eagerly. Mac followed his gaze and saw its object.

Moored to a landing on the other side was a big seagoing tug. Fluttering from its bow was a strange emblem, a sign of which Brand had told him that morning —a blue triangle on a field of white.

The finest thing about Mac was that he never waited. It was a cold spring morning, but that didn't matter. He peeled off his coat and his shoes and plunged over the embankment. A moment later he was swimming in pursuit of the row-boat.

CHAPTER TWELVE

RIGHT OUT OF THE BARREL

PADDY MacPORTLAND had won a belt in the amateur swimming finals on the Charles River, up Boston way, the summer before. He had made a name for himself with his famous left stroke that every swimmer, amateur and professional, in the East knew and respected, and he was never more grateful for his aquatic prowess than in this urgent hour.

It was no wild, foolish impulse which sent him so quickly and so silently into the cold water. In his mind there was a well-defined plan before he made that leap; the only way open to him if he were to win. Mac would rather drown than go back to Brand with his mission unaccomplished. And he would rather have died than stood there inactive while a helpless girl was carried away by Graffery and his evil-visaged associates. Mac was loyal and Mac was chivalrous, so Mac jumped into the water without delay.

In a flash he saw the possibilities of the situation. They might be planning to drown Berenice; they might be ready to make their way out to the open sea, there to overtake a waiting ship bound for a distant port.

"I'll stick to them, and maybe I can still turn a trick," he told himself as he spat the water from his mouth and let his head rise above the surface. He was a few hundred feet behind the row-boat, which was moving at a fair clip across the river. As Mac had dived from behind the shielding projection of the embankment they had not seen him. In supreme assurance that they were unobserved, the sinister group sat in the skiff, and once Mac saw the old dandy wave a handkerchief toward the tug. If there was an answering signal, Mac did not observe it.

He was chilled to the bone, but he gritted his teeth together and swam on doggedly, exulting inwardly as he saw the row-boat drawing near the tug and the journey coming to an end. Presently the row-boat came alongside the larger craft. A man in the soiled uniform of an engineer made the rope fast, and Mac saw the big fellow lift Berenice to the deck. The engineer caught her, for she grasped at the air and seemed about to fall. Then the man on the deck half-dragged her through the doorway.

It was now up to Mac to do something and do it quickly. Graffery and the old man were clambering on deck; at any moment the tug might put out, and the plucky young sleuth determined that as long as Berenice was on board it should not leave him behind.

Dropping immediately beneath the surface, he swam around the tug with short, quick strokes. He came to the surface near to the far side of the tug, and a careful examination convinced Mac that on this side there was no one watching. He was gasping for breath now, but still eager and determined.

Reaching upward, he grabbed the low railing and noiselessly clambered aboard. The water ran dripping from him to the deck, threatening momentarily to betray his presence, even if he himself were not seen. But Mac was not waiting to take chances. It was not possible for him to wait. He wasn't the waiting kind. He knew he was playing a genuinely desperate game now, for he distrusted Graffery and all his friends, and he was resolved to balk at nothing, to stop at nothing, to get the most out of every chance that came his way, and to take the consequences.

Quickly he glanced around him and gave a little gasp of relief. There was a barrel standing near the door covered with canvas. If he could get into that barrel and hide under the canvas before he was observed, he might gain some knowledge of what the mysterious procedure he had watched signified. Although no definite plan of action had been mapped in his mind, Mac was hoping to learn enough of the secrets of this party to escape to shore and inform his chief. But he would not leave the tug until he knew enough.

Voices came to him from inside, and every moment he feared some one would emerge and discover him. With the utmost trepidation he began tiptoing toward the barrel. On the way he noticed a small iron marlin spike, and, stooping, carefully secured it. With this, his sole means of offense and defense, he felt more secure. It would have hurt Mac to the core had he ever found himself licked because he didn't have anything to throw. It would have been disgraceful.

Still, fortunately undiscovered, he reached the barrel and cautiously lifted the cover. To his immeasurable relief, it was empty. Had it been filled with sand or water or something equally hard to move this chronicle might be different in the telling. As it was, Mac got under the cover not a second too soon. Hardly had he squatted down in the barrel before he heard two men step out on the deck. He prayed they might not notice his wet footprints. From the voices he was able at once to recognize Graffery; the other man, he guessed, was the engineer of the tug.

"What have you done?" asked Graffery gruffly.

"You said to have everything ready, boss. Well, everything's ready."

To Mac's consternation, Graffery gave the barrel an idle kick as he passed it.

"Very well. You, Higgs, being the newest member of the Blue Triangle, a convert, as we may say, to the principles of liberty, equality and justice for which we stand, are the least to be considered in our present predicament. Therefore, you are not to be present at the trial. Some one must watch for spies"—he added in an argumentative tone, as if anticipating the objections of Higgs —"and certainly old Mr. Leyder can't guard; certainly I can't; and most certainly Mr. Roth can't, so there you are!"

"Very well, boss," answered Higgs humbly. "As a son of liberty I serve; I don't give a durn how I serve, so long *as* I serve!"

Mac heard Graffery shamble inside again, and heard a shuffling of feet which indicated all were descending into the cockpit cabin, just below deck. The knowledge that all the rest would be busy below; that Higgs, the son of liberty, was the only one left to guard the deck, was welcome news to the man in the barrel. Like the true sportsman and adventurer that he was, he seized the opportunity on the instant.

For a few seconds Mac waited, until the quiet inside assured him all danger from the others was, for a moment, at an end. Then cautiously he raised the canvas cover.

Higgs was standing bareheaded not ten inches from the barrel. His back was to Mac and he was gazing thoughtfully at the deserted, barren shore. Mac realized there must be no struggle to alarm those below; there must be no scuffling, no noise.

Mac lifted his iron spike and brought it down on the engineer's head.

He brought it down firmly, squarely, and the result was instantaneous. Higgs dropped backward and Mac caught him in his arms, allowing him to drop noiselessly to the deck.

Then Mac climbed out of the barrel.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ON TRIAL

MAC'S immediate problem lay at his feet.

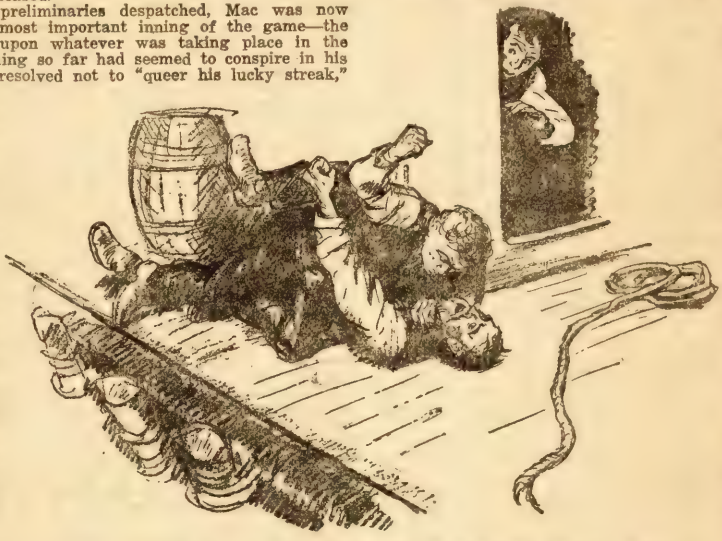
He had not struck Higgs so hard that the engineer would remain insensible more than five or ten minutes at the most. In his three years' service under Gordon Brand Mac had mixed it up many times; and he knew, from many past experiences, that the man lying so still on the deck would be opening his eyes and swearing beautifully in a very short time.

Against this danger, therefore, Mac first set out to

secure himself. He moved about the deck with less caution, for he figured those below would think the noise was made by the unconscious Higgs. A few minutes of scouting brought him to a coil of rope that exactly suited his purpose. With this he quickly returned to the side of the fallen engineer and proceeded to truss him up in a scientific knotting arrangement which Mac had acquired from Brand in one lesson, and with which he would have been willing to challenge Houdini and his whole company. When the last knot had been tied Mac rescued his dripping handkerchief from his rear pocket and, forcing the engineer's mouth open, stuffed the handkerchief in. Finding another strip of cloth handy, the young sleuth arranged this across the mouth, tying it behind the ears with knots so strong that he felt satisfied Higgs, the son of liberty, would serve his cause in silence and repose until he was released.

With these preliminaries despatched, Mac was now ready for the most important inning of the game—the eavesdropping upon whatever was taking place in the cabin. Everything so far had seemed to conspire in his favor, and he resolved not to "queer his lucky streak," as he phrased it mentally, by being incautious or imprudent. He stole silently through the doorway.

As he stood at the head of the companionway and listened, murmurs of tantalizing significance came to him from below. The deep, snarling tones of Graffery, the mewling whine of the old man, whom Graffery had called "Mr. Leyder," the hoarse growl of the boatman, whose name was evidently Roth, and once the pleading voice of the girl, crossed and blended in an unending dialogue. Once there was a long silence, and Mac feared that they had suspected something was amiss. He hid behind a door and waited feverishly, but presently the murmur of voices came to him again and he knew that all was well.



Mac climbed on top of him, pummeling him, grabbing, twisting, writhing and panting.

Mac then resolved to get closer to the scene. He must hear more distinctly and he wanted to see, too. Dropping to his knees, he began crawling, face forward, down the ladder-like stairs, moving as stealthily as a serpent. He had not descended three rungs before the entire scene was clear before his eyes.

In the tiny cabin the party made an incongruous jumble of faces. Mac found that his position was one of the greatest peril, for if any one of them looked toward the stairs he would have been detected. He made up his mind to retreat at once, after getting one good look at the situation.

They were all seated around a little table, over which was hung an oil lantern. Its rays threw grotesque shadows on their faces. The girl was in the center, very pale, and, Mac thought, very white and determined. To her right was Graffery, and to her left sat old Leyder; Roth, the boatman, sat opposite them. They were bent over the table engaged in earnest controversy.

Mac began a careful retreat back up the ladder. No Indian ever moved more quietly on the prairie than he. It was a difficult business, but by great straining he managed to lift himself until he was out of the angle of their vision, though he could still hear clearly. Apparently, he had arrived at a crucial moment in the progress of the conference.

"My brothers," he heard Graffery say mournfully, "I warn you, I have tried all this. Entreaties, threats, calls to duty and to vows mean nothing to this wretched girl. She will never yield!"

"She must yield! Oh, she must yield! We'll have to make her yield!" croaked old Leyder threateningly. "She wouldn't like that; now, mind, I tell you!"

"And if she finally refuses?" asked Graffery tentatively.

"Then she knows the penalty provided by the Triangle!" cried Roth with an ominous note in his voice.

A cry of scorn came from Berenice.

"Die!" she cried with such spirit as made Mac's heart beat a tattoo of applause. "Who wouldn't rather die than be in the clutches of such wretches as you?"

Roth's fist came down fiercely on the table.

"And does the cause no longer mean anything to you?" he demanded.

"The cause!" the girl mocked hysterically. "The cause! No, I don't care a bat of my eyelash for your cause. It was never my cause. You know why I went into it with you. This scheming, blackguardedly anarchist half-brother of mine, the son of a father who broke my mother's heart, the man who robbed our family of all that was ours *made* me do it. You know that—every one of you know it! He came back to my house and threatened to throw my poor, feeble old mother and me into the street because he had the power to and we were penniless. He wanted a woman agent for his dirty work, and he chose me, and I had no choice but to obey. At first I tried to have some enthusiasm for the principles you said you worked for, but I soon found out the caliber of men you really are. You are outlaws; you are selfish thieves, working to gain other men's gold under the guise of freedom. I hate you! Good God, how I detest you!"

Mac felt like applauding her.

"The oath!" roared Graffery. "And what of your oath to the Blue Triangle Society?"

"A schoolgirl's vow, made because I was forced to make it!" cried the unhappy girl. "And you would hold me to it!"

She broke off sobbing, but the others would not spare her.

"You bet we'll hold you to it!" screamed Graffery in a rage. "Here, in this boat, we elude and evade the police, our meetings are not spied upon, we are secure and you are in our power. You bet we'll hold you to it. To its fifth clause, my daisy, we'll hold you. Matters have gone too far. My brothers, recall! Recall that only yesterday morning we believed Rogden our most powerful friend in America. And then, by noon, we had received the cable from Petrograd, from our faithful brothers in the capital, informing us that Rogden was no Russian at heart, but a spy paid in the coin of our foreign foes, paid by the Kaiser! My brothers, Rogden is dead. How he died we have no time to discuss. Rogden is dead; Rogden, who came to us and told us he was possessed by demons and witches, who lied and cheated all his life—Rogden is dead! For all that we know our plans are already in the hands of our enemies abroad because we trusted him. We can trust no one any more. This stubborn girl disappeared from the bosom of her family; she has refused to say where she was all that time; she possesses our very life secrets. We can take no chances. Gentlemen and brothers, I ask the verdict of the Blue Triangle!"

There was a deep silence for a moment.

"Remember her oath and yours!" went on Graffery.

"I have nothing to remember," replied Berenice with the proud, cold tone of despair. "You have threatened long enough. My lips are sealed. Do your worst!"

"Then," bellowed Graffery, in a terrible fit of anger, "you shall be food for the deep-sea fish! The crabs shall pluck out your eyes and the sharks——"

But Mac heard no more. He was suddenly brought back to a realization of his own danger by feeling some one grab his ankles and jerk him swiftly up from the ladder. Then he was forcibly turned over. He saw standing above him, menacing him with a gleaming revolver, the big coachman.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

COLONEL BLACKSTONE LAUGHS

SOME one—or some thing—had walked upside-down on the ceiling of the room in which Pertelevitch Rogden had met his death.

Gordon Brand had never heard of any one who could walk head downward like a fly, yet there was the evidence of two feet on the ceiling above his head. They had been made by some one with small feet, some one who wore French heels; therefore, the some one was feminine. As the ceiling was dusty, two perfect impressions had been made.

"Better than thumbprints are two perfect impressions of a witch's feet," said Brand to himself. In his chair he sat gazing at them with the devout admiration and delight you will see on the faces of art worshipers in the Louvre. Those two footprints were far more interesting to Brand just then than any work of art could ever be, and he was a connoisseur. These fascinated his sense of the peculiar, the grotesque, the altogether impossible and absurd.

"Footprints on the ceiling," he said to himself with a whimsical chuckle. "Can it be possible that Laggis sometimes takes it into her head to walk upside-down?"

Going to the telephone, the investigator asked the clerk to send up a man with a stepladder, and when this arrived he climbed up to the top and proceeded to study the footprints at close range. He measured them carefully with the spring tapeline, which can always be noticed bulging in his lower left vest pocket, and then stared quizzically at the top of the window, which was more than two feet away.

"Even going back to the theory that some one was lowered from the room above," he argued while balancing himself on the top of the stepladder, "and even granting that to be the case, no man swinging on a rope through that window, and certainly no woman, ever came through with enough speed to make their feet touch the ceiling at this distance. No! That is impossible."

A new idea occurred to him, and he descended the ladder and went to the telephone again.

"What is the number of the room immediately above Mr. Rogden's?" he asked.

"No. 827," was the response.

"Can you tell me who occupied it last evening?"

The clerk was gone from the phone for a moment, but returned with the information that a gentleman named Roth had engaged the room, but that he had not remained there after eight or nine o'clock.

"Did Roth have any callers?" asked Brand.

"I don't know, Mr. Brand. I'm the day clerk here and this was last night."

Brand, always impatient of delay, asked if there were not some means of getting the night clerk on the phone, and after five minutes of urging, persuading and quibbling he managed to reach the man he wanted. The night clerk, aroused from his sleep at home, was inclined to be disagreeable until he learned that it was Gordon Brand on the other end of the phone, and that he wanted information on the murder case. Then he became a talking encyclopedia.

Yes, he remembered Roth distinctly, although he did not recall ever having seen him before. Roth was a big fellow; yes, very large, very swarthy, very fierce-looking. He had reached the hotel about five o'clock and had insisted on getting a room on the seventh or eighth floor.

"Did he stipulate Room 827?" asked Brand.

The clerk said he did not; he merely wanted a room on the seventh or eighth floor, and it was simply by chance that he was given the room over Rogden. Roth had carried only a suitcase. About six o'clock he had two callers. They were a tall, humpbacked man and a very old, dried-up man, both of whom had been shown up to Roth's room. There, according to the clerk, they had remained for quite a while; indeed, he had no recollection of seeing them leave. Things got very excited after Rogden's body was discovered.

As he hung up the receiver Brand heard a knock at the door, and, on opening it, found Russell there. He had come to tell Brand of the sudden departure of Graffery with Berenice Patterson and the others from the house on Garland avenue; and he had considered the matter so important that he would not discuss it over the phone, but came direct to the Rembrandt. He also told Brand what he had learned about the plans of Slade to arrest Berenice.

In the light of what he had just learned from the night clerk, the news of the departure of Graffery and the others assumed an unusual significance. Brand was glad he had Mac on the job, for he knew he could depend on him to bring home the bacon, if bacon were to be had. Some of his theories were a little upset by his morning work, but he was never disturbed at that. A new fact changed the world for Brand; a new theory might come to his head any moment.

Meanwhile, he had a test of his own which he wished to make. He led Russell to the hotel corridor, where he stood him beside the bluecoat on guard at the door, which he closed.

"Now, Russell," he said, "I wish you and the officer here would do me a favor. Turn around and face the door. That's it! Now wait just a moment."

A second later, when they turned, he had disappeared. They looked wonderingly at each other, though Russell was now well used to his chief's eccentric tactics, and he knew perfectly well Brand had a good reason for what he was doing. But presently they were given a startling shock.

"Officer! Russell! Help me! Save me!"

It was Brand's voice, and it came from behind the door which the policeman had guarded all along. Like frightened children, they threw open the door and rushed in. The room was empty.

Then they turned and saw Brand standing behind them in the doorway. He was smiling and triumphant.

"I've solved one part of this mystery, anyway," he said gaily. "Did you hear the ghost?"

Before the astonished policeman and Russell could reply there was an interruption. A drawling salutation came from the doorway.

"You astonished me also, Mr. Brand!"

It was Colonel Blackstone, who had come upon them abruptly. It seemed to Brand as if he had stepped out of a shadowy closet at the end of the corridor; at any rate, he appeared in their midst suddenly, and almost as if by magic. Brand smiled gamely at the puzzling old proprietor.

"Oh, this is not such a great mystery, after all, colonel," he said. "I believe I will know all about it in a little while."

The colonel puffed ponderously on his cigar and smiled patronizingly.

"You are a clever man, Mr. Brand," he admitted. "And you work fast. By gad, you do work fast! But are you sure you understand *all* the features of this unhappy and most mysterious affair?"

"Not all," confessed Brand frankly, and inwardly longing to punch the colonel's irritating nose for him. "Not all, as yet. I am willing to wager I can find everything mortal that has been done in these doors. But I cannot put my finger on a single clue to that weird creature, Laggis; but I'll get her yet."

Colonel Blackstone threw back his head and laughed in unrestrained hilarity.

"I wish you luck, Mr. Brand," he choked, and, still laughing heartily and waving his hand good-by, he stalked loftily down the corridor.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PRIVATE INFORMATION

THERE came another knock at the door after Brand and Russell had been left alone in Rogden's room. This time it was Burns, come to report on the assignment which Brand had given him that morning.

"I've gathered the material you desired, Mr. Brand," he said, smiling. The investigator nodded approvingly. In his mind he could not help contrasting this earnest, polite, correct young man with the harum-scarum, devil-may-care, successful MacPortland. Though he liked Burns well enough, yet Brand could not help comparing his formal and reserved manner, which held even his friends aloof, from the gay boyishness of his young Irish assistant. And Brand wished Mac were back to keep him company.

"Well, let's hear what you got," said Brand, gazing encouragingly at Burns when the three were seated.

Burns drew a small sheet of note-paper from his pocket and proceeded to make a verbal report from the data he had jotted down.

"The parents of Berenice Patterson," he began, "were formerly very rich, but after old man Patterson's death, fifteen years ago, the family fell on evil times. The mother remarried, her second husband being named Graffery. He died about five years after her first husband did. Since that time the mother and Berenice Patterson have lived alone in their old house up on Garland avenue. The girl has supported herself by giving music lessons; but they have existed in the most exacting poverty and are always facing the poorhouse. But Berenice Patterson, I understand, has made a brave struggle to keep the house together, and to keep her mother, who is a little flighty in her old age, in her home."

"Very good!" interrupted Brand. "Now what have you learned about the Graffery who is up there now?"

"I am coming to that," answered Burns with self-conscious pride. "This humpbacked fellow is Graffery's son, but, of course, is no relation either to Berenice or her mother. He ran away from home, I understand, when a very young man, and, being a fellow of sudden temper, wild passions and excitable nature, addicted to every new movement that promises adventure, he has had a pretty turbulent career. He has figured in several international scandals, they tell me. He came back home about eight years ago and remained only a year; but in that year he turned a trick.

"He secured possession of the mortgages and other liens on the Garland avenue property, making him absolute master of that house. He is not poor, by any means. This left Berenice Patterson and her mother completely at his mercy. Then he disappeared. Subsequently, there were rumors that he had been connected up with an anarchistic crowd in Petrograd. The next thing, he was fighting with the Greeks against the Bulgarians; he was everywhere, seeking adventure.

"About a year ago Graffery returned to New York and took up his residence at once in the house in Garland avenue. He made Berenice cook his meals, make his bed, and generally look after his welfare. This the neighbors have talked about for many months. Immediately he became identified with a crowd in town noted for their anarchistic tendencies. Old man Leyder—you remember him—is one of his boon companions. This gang has circulated seditious matter ever since the war began. Graffery nearly went to prison not long ago for a speech he delivered in which he denounced the selective draft."

"Did you make any inquiries as to how Berenice Patterson first met Rogden?" asked Brand.

"Yes. Rogden took up with Graffery as soon as he reached New York. They were boon companions. The neighbors said the girl never loved him—you know how neighbors get wise to these family affairs. Rogden must have been mixed up with the anarchists in Russia."

Brand clapped his hands together.

"Well done, Burns!" he said. "The information you have dug up is just the kind of stuff I wanted. I am beginning to see a streak of daylight in this business, and I am tremendously interested in the dawn, for this has been one black night of mystery, if ever there was one. Take it from me, this case is going to be a hummer. I wonder how our friend Slade, from headquarters, is coming on."

In answer to his question, the door was flung open and Detective Slade, grinning triumphantly, entered the room.

"Ah, Brand!" he said patronizingly. "You and your Watson still busy, I see. Old Sherlock Holmes up to his tricks, eh? Well, have you landed the murderer in jail yet?"

"I'm just nosing around," pleaded Brand in mock humility.

"Well, you can go home now and take a rest," added Slade with a nasty bite in his tone. "The case is over."

"Over?"

"Yes, over! The guilty party will be under arrest in a very short time."

Brand cleared his throat and winked at Russell.

"And do you happen to know where the young lady is?" he asked softly.

"Young lady? What do you know about it?" snarled the baffled and surprised man from headquarters.

"Only this, old top: Berenice Patterson did not commit the murder in the first place, so you're on the wrong track there. And also Berenice Patterson is gone, and I am about the only decent man in New York who has any means of tracing her."

Slade walked closer to Brand and planted himself in front of him aggressively.

"Say, look here, Brand!" he snarled. "Don't try any monkey business with me. I want to know why you think Berenice Patterson didn't kill Rogden, when I can prove she went to his room and can establish a motive?"

"I don't think she is innocent; I know she is," answered Brand serenely. "And, Slade, I don't really have to tell you anything, you know; but I don't mind putting you straight just this once. Berenice didn't commit this

murder because she is five feet eight inches tall. Come on, boys! We've still got a busy day ahead."

Brand, with Burns and Russell, left the room, with the astonished Slade speechless with wrath in the middle of the floor.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LAGGIS GOES TOO FAR

"THERE are still some points I should like to clear up before I return to the office," said Brand as they reached the lobby of the Rembrandt. "There should be some important despatches waiting there for me from Washington. Still, I would like to turn this next little trick myself. Suppose you boys go on ahead to the office and wait for me there."

When Burns and Russell left him, Brand proceeded at once to the editorial rooms of the *News*, where he inquired for the society editor. He was introduced to Miss Summers, a lady aptly named, as she evidently had known a great many of them. Miss Summers was overwhelmed at the honor of a personal call from the distinguished investigator, whom she had once interviewed for a special Sunday feature story which had appeared with her name over it and all. Brand praised her for the excellent way she had handled that interview, and she, very much flattered, stated her entire willingness to help him in any way that she could.

"I want to question you about the Rogden murder case," said Brand frankly, and the little maiden lady flushed and became very self-conscious at being brought into such an important matter. She was his willing ally from the start.

"Your paper carried an announcement last evening of the breaking off of the engagement of Rogden and Miss Patterson," said Brand. "Would you mind explaining to me how that information came into your hands?"

"Why, yes," she replied readily. "The announcement was brought here in person by Miss Patterson."

Brand's face did not betray his surprise.

"At what time?" he asked.

"Just about this hour. She came here and asked for the society editor, and was brought to my office. It was too late for us to make much of a story of it, or we would have played it up. But as it was, we merely got an announcement in the evening final. We tried to see Rogden meanwhile and failed."

"How did she appear?" asked Brand. "I mean, was her manner composed, or did she seem to you to be nervous and excited?"

"Oh, quite excited. She was hardly able to control the pitch of her voice while she was talking, and she kept twisting her fingers around her meshbag. But I considered some excitement natural when the nature of the announcement was thought out."

Brand smiled gratefully.

"You are a splendid informant, Miss Summers," he assured her. "I wish all we have to question in this business were like newspaper women. And, Miss Summers, of course you will understand that this call to see you is entirely a matter of confidence?"

The sprightly and flattered Miss Summers put her finger to her lips, vowing eternal silence, and Brand, with renewed thanks, took his leave. As he began walking back to the office he taxed himself with questions.

"Who had the confidence of Berenice Patterson during her absence from home?" he asked himself. "Surely she was not alone all this time. It will be an important matter if we can establish who was her closest friend, man or woman. Burns must look into that."

Still pondering over other puzzling features of the case, he walked the remainder of the distance with knitted brows. He was still playing a jig-saw puzzle in his mind, but he was finding big blocks now which dovetailed amazingly well, and he was hoping optimistically for important details in his Washington despatches. Rogden's real purpose in this country, he was satisfied, would explain away a great many mysteries.

When he mounted the steps of the building which housed his suite of offices he was surprised to find Burns and Russell in excited conversation in front of his private door.

"Everything's locked up!" cried Russell. "We can't get in! What's happened?"

Brand felt a little apprehension at such an unexpected happening, but he drew out his keys in silence and opened the door. A little hurriedly he entered the outer office, where Enid had her desk, and was surprised to find it deserted. He entered his own private room and passed on back into his laboratory. The entire suite was empty; Enid Starr was not there.

"This is strange!" muttered Brand uneasily. "Enid never leaves the office. She has her lunches sent up from the Little Florence restaurant down the street. What can have called her away, I wonder?"

He was not left long in doubt. On Brand's desk there lay a single sheet of paper, on which, in blue pencil, a triangle had been drawn. Within this was written:

> "The time draws short, the hours are few, the dog does bark, the cat does mew. The girl's my hostage, she's my prize. Hunt for her with all your eyes. Laggis has her in her den. Find the murderer. Until then the girl's with me! The girl's with me! Twiddle-de-dum and twiddle-de-dee!"

With a gasp of rage Brand threw the paper to the floor and ground it beneath his heel.

"Magic! Damned witchcraft!" he cried. "It shall not have *her!* Beautiful Enid in the power of Laggis. I'll get her free if it costs me my immortal soul!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MAC TURNS A TRICK

IF Mac had hesitated in that moment of wild surprise all his work would have been lost.

The red-whiskered man, who had come upon him so unexpectedly, had the young investigator apparently at his mercy, but Mac was not content to have it so. With an agile twist he grabbed the legs of his foeman and gave him a sudden jerk that sent him sprawling to the deck.

Then, with another squirm, Mac climbed on top of him, pummeling him, grabbing, twisting, writhing and panting, determined to hold him down and overpower him. Youth and agility were with Mac, but the older man was strong as an ox, fighting mad, and no dub either at wrestling or boxing.

However, Mac had the advantage, and with the red-whiskered man under him, he figured he could hold him there until he could secure him permanently. In the excitement of the tussle Mac had forgotten about the conspirators below in the cockpit cabin, but his antagonist had not. As soon as breath returned to him the red-whiskered man began to yell:

"Graffery! Roth! Leyder! Higgs!" he called. "Where the devil are all of you? Come up here quick!"

This so enraged Mac that he brought his fist down on the mouth of the coachman with a vindicative punch, and the man dropped back as still as if he had been rocked to sleep. Mac leaped to his feet and scrambled to the deck. He knew now he was up against hopeless odds. Caught red-handed, spying upon the inner council of the Blue Triangle Society, he knew he would fare cruelly at their hands. If he allowed himself to be taken now his fate would be sealed.

As he ran to the stern he caught sight of a little boat tied to the tug bobbing about on the surface. The oars lay invitingly in the bottom. He could spring into that and

make off for the shore before any of those below could reach him.

In an instant all this passed through his mind, for already he could hear the conspirators bounding up the ladder. But with one foot on the deck rail Mac hesitated; he paused, he stepped down and faced about just as Graffery burst out on the deck.

Paddy MacPortland couldn't run away when a woman was being tortured.

With folded arms he confronted the lot of them as they stood in a little group amazed at sight of him.

"Who are you, you scoundrel?" roared Roth as he stood in a threatening attitude before the unflinching Mac.

"What the devil do you mean by this?" growled Graffery, sidling up closer like a deformed and evil toad. "You'll pay for this! You're a spy!"

Leyder stood off, regarding him with the complacent expression of a hungry vulture who sees a pleasant meal about to swing from a gibbet.

But in these Mac was not interested just then. He was looking at them; he was looking behind them to the door through which they had just rushed, and he was doing his best to appear as if he did not see what he really was seeing.

Berenice Patterson had come out on deck. She had followed her judges up the stairs. Her pallid face was lighted with a faint hope as she took in the strange scene before her. Mac wished he could signal to her; he wished he could tell her there was a way out, but he knew if he made a move he would betray her.

"What do you want here, I say?" demanded Roth again, with a roar that echoed up and down the river, and seemed to alarm the timorous Leyder. "Speak quick!"

Then a plan darted into Mac's mind; a plan for saving Berenice.

"I want to talk to the captain of this craft," he answered, his voice firm. He was fencing for time. "Don't look at me like a pirate. I'm no spy. I'm here with a message. Say, if I wanted to escape"—and here Mac looked straight into the timid eyes of Berenice—"it would be the easiest thing in the world right this minute. I didn't have to stay here when I knocked that red-whiskered funny face out. Not me. I could have climbed in that little boat and rowed across in no time."

Mac pointed behind him to the other side where the little rowboat was moored, but he kept his eyes on Berenice. She seemed doubtful, hesitating, then a sudden resolve came over her countenance. To Mac's unbounded joy, she disappeared through the doorway.

Mac knew he must act now to center the attention of all of them on himself. He moved forward with a quick little gesture that instantly set the three men upon him to prevent the attack they expected. And Mac did give them a struggle. Roth grabbed his arms and Mac shook himself free, and then all three threw themselves upon him. He kept them busy as long as he could.

This had been exactly what Mac had desired. It had kept all three busy, and had given Berenice the chance she needed. He hoped she had seized it, for it had cost Mac a black eye and a bloody nose in the struggle he precipitated.

Leyder hurried inside and then hurried out again with a coil of rope. With this they bound Mac to a stanchion, pinioning his arms behind him and reducing him to utter helplessness. Both Roth and Graffery labored over this task, while Leyder, as if struck by a sudden idea—much to Mac's dismay—went below.

Presently those on deck heard him squeal and shout, and he suddenly reappeared on deck breathless from excitement.

"The girl! Berenice! She got away!" he gasped.

With an impotent cry Graffery rushed to the stern. He shaded his eyes and saw, out in the middle of the river, a small boat being rowed by a girl. Blasphemy and curses thundered from his lips. He ripped a knife from his belt and made for Mac.

"You cursed spy!" he howled. "I'll kill you!"

But Roth pulled him back and pointed to the door. Emerging on the deck was Mac's old enemy, the coachman. "Stop, Graffery!" he said solemnly. "I have a better plan."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LEYDER SETTLES THE MATTER

THE coachman had an almost patriarchal air as he faced his companions. At his interruption Graffery drew back his knife, and all turned to see what he had to say.

"Well, what is it, Grimes?" asked Graffery with an ill grace.

Grimes stroked his red whiskers and looked at Mac, bound and helpless.

"That boy is but a detail," he said scornfully; "and yet you would waste your precious time upon him."

"He spied on us! He helped the girl get away!" argued Graffery indignantly.

"Then attend to him; but wait. I came out here with important news and you are delaying me. Pay strict attention to what I say. You realize that Rogden had a secret store of gold in this country, don't you? You realize that he had to pay his people, don't you? Probably he has gold to the value of half a million hidden somewhere in New York. Think of half a million for the cause!"

Leyder turned a beaming face on the others, who also seemed impressed. The solemn Grimes proceeded:

"When I returned to Mr. Graffery's house on Garland avenue I found that surprising intelligence awaited me there. The branch of our society in Washington has been most alert in trailing the movements of Victor Fein. They informed me that he had engaged a reservation on the train which leaves the capital at three o'clock this afternoon for New York.

"Now, brothers, we can only guess at the motive which is really bringing Victor Fein to New York. But I think we can make a pretty good guess. Rogden is dead; long live Fein. Rogden being dead, it is important that Fein take over his documents and his store of gold, which are hidden, I feel sure, within five miles of us at this very moment.

"So, gentlemen, if we can stick close enough to Victor Fein when he reaches town to-night, he will lead us to the hiding-place, and then we can take care of him. And don't forget that while the half million dollars will be a glorious addition to the treasury of our society, that the papers of Rogden will be pearls beyond price. He undoubtedly has a spy list of the principal German agents in this country. They can deceive us no more, if we once get our hands on that book. He must have cipher keys, secret plans, everything!"

Roth, Lyder and Graffery were profoundly interested. They talked it over among themselves until they were interrupted by a movement on the deck. It was Higgs.

That unhappy servant lay there just as he had been placed by Mac after he climbed out of the barrel. And his eyes looked pleadingly up at his friends, begging them to release him. This Roth did promptly enough, and he was at once admitted to the discussion, cursing at Mac.

"All of them members of the Blue Triangle, even the engineer," said Mac to himself. "Swell chance I've got!"

The red-whiskered man once more assumed an oracular attitude. He spread wide his hands, as if he were going to pronounce a benediction, and all the others quieted down at once. He was the leader, the brains of the gang, and they listened to him with profound attention.

"The escape of our accused sister," he resumed solemnly, "is a serious matter. She is in possession of secrets which would bring ruin on a high and holy purpose were they to be betrayed to the authorities of so-called law and order. We must take measures to trace Berenice Patterson. My personal belief is she will return at once to her dwelling on Garland avenue, and that she will be found there.

"Three problems, therefore, confront us now. We must try to find our erring sister—for whom ample provision is made in the fifth clause of our oath—before she has had an opportunity to inform against us to the police. That will be the immediate duty of Brother Leyder, Brother Graffery and myself.

"Whatever comes of that, however, we three shall be in the Pennsylvania station to meet the train on which Victor Fein left Washington. I have a photograph and a careful description of Fein in my house; for a long time we have suspected him. It will be our business to trail him; to find out what he wants here, and to leave him alone until he has revealed us the hiding-place of Rogden.

"However we may feel about our escaped sister, there can be no feeling about the third problem with which we must deal. I came to this isolated boat, where we have a right to expect the utmost privacy during our deliberations, and found this fellow, on his knees, listening to the progress of a conference of the inner council of the Blue Triangle. Undoubtedly he has heard enough to ruin us. The Society believes in peace and decries war; it believes in kindness and mercy, when those good virtues are open to honor, but they can have no place, my brethren, now in our decision. If we allowed this man to go free, we would ourselves suffer at the hands of the law. He must not go free!"

Stroking his red whiskers thoughtfully, he turned and surveyed Mac from head to foot. The others also gazed at the prisoner, who glared back at them with flashing, defiant eyes.

"What sentence would you suggest?" asked old Leyder politely.

"For him there is only one sentence," answered Grimes authoritatively. "He must die! There is no question about that. The only question is, how can it be done with the least danger of our getting in trouble with the detectives?"

"Ah! Then I have it!"

The old man beckoned for the others to come closer, and they bent over while he murmured to them the details of his idea. Evidently it impressed them all. Higgs ran inside to ascertain something and returned with the glad tidings that it was all right, whatever it might have been. This settled the matter.

Higgs went below, and Roth began fumbling with the lines. Grimes, Leyder and Graffery climbed into the small boat which had brought them from the city shore. The boat in which Berenice Patterson had escaped had been the one in which Grimes had rowed out in.

Crouched over his oars, Graffery made an evil sight on the waters, lit so kindly by the afternoon sun. Mac never forgot how he looked.

Then the tug got under way; her nose was turned to midstream and then southward, bound for the harbor and the open sea.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

MAC'S DARKEST HOUR

MAC realized his predicament was well nigh hopeless. Roth was in the wheelhouse, and Higgs was below at the engine and doing his own firing as well. That meant that Higgs would be an exceedingly busy man, for it is a big job for two men to run a tugboat. If he could have freed himself from his bonds, Mac would not have found it hard to escape.

But Roth had done his job all too well when he bound Mac. Those knots were woven with the cunning of an experienced sailor who knew how to handle the ropes. The more the young investigator shifted and twisted, the more uncomfortable he became. The ropes chafed his hands and wrists; they cut deep furrows in his flesh, and the blood came, but they gave not at all. There was absolutely no hope of releasing himself from those bonds; that Mac found out in a very short time.

As Mac passed the familiar scenes which he had known since boyhood, the shore line of his native city in review before his eyes, his spirits sank lower and lower. He was a young man, and he had cherished bright visions of success, and had worked hard to make them come true. He had been willing to work a great deal harder whenever that became necessary. There was the city in which he had chosen to build that future; its rugged, familiar outlines seemed never so friendly, never so home-like, as in this bitterness of despair.

As they came now to the lower part of the river, where the traffic was becoming congested, Higgs bounded up-stairs, as if he had forgotten something, and partly releasing Mac, carried him inside the door. It was a wise precaution, for Mac had noticed many passing boatmen staring curiously at the trussed-up figure on the deck of the tug which flew a Blue Triangle at its masthead.

Prostrate there on the floor, just within the door, where Higgs had thrown him, Mac looked around in the hope of finding some means of releasing himself, but there was none. No sign of any blade or anything sharp with which he could sever one rope could he find. And every now and then Higgs ran up from below, just for a second, and took a look at his prisoner. They were taking no chances with Mac.

Hour after hour passed. Mac knew they were almost to Sandy Hook, and soon the rolling and pitching of the tug told him that they were on the ocean.

Through the narrow door Mac had watched the blood-red sunset dye the wide waters crimson, and then the gathering shadows steal over the deep. Soon darkness covered the waters.

It was very dark where Mac lay, and also very uncomfortable. Showers of spray drenched him often, but he did not care, and the darkness was welcome. Mac had reviewed his life as he lay there; he had resolved to meet his fate in a way that would make Gordon Brand or Berenice Patterson proud, if they were ever told, and so he was ready. But Mac, in the depths of his anxious young soul, longed for one chance at fair fight with Roth or Higgs before he gave up.

They meant to give him no such chance, however. When it was entirely dark the speed of the tug began to slacken, and finally it seemed to Mac that it had stopped altogether. Then Roth came to him.

Like a giant black ogre he picked Mac up in his arms and carried him out to the deck. Out there the wind was blowing furiously and the night air was bitter cold.

Without a word Roth set Mac down upon his feet. The intrepid young spy had thrown off his shoes when he plunged overboard in pursuit that morning. His stocking-feet now rested on some kind of cloth.

Roth reached down to his feet and began fumbling with the cloth. Mac longed to brain him, but his bonds showed no sign of giving. Roth began lifting the cloth, and Mac found that it was all around him; that, in fact, he was standing in a sack which was being lifted about him.

The neck of the bag did not come over his head, and Roth drew it tight. It was vile smelling inside there and foul. Roth forced Mac to double himself up so that the bag would hold him. In this crumpled position the neck of the bag could be drawn over Mac's head, and Roth tied the knots tightly.

In these last moments of desperation Mac did not give up. He would not admit defeat. Cramped in that narrow bag, he still struggled with his ropes. And, to his great surprise, he found that, whereas when he had been stretched out on the floor he could do nothing, in this narrow position he could get a purchase. He struggled for dear life and got a big loop free from his neck, and began working on the lashings around his wrists.

Then the dread question came to him: "Why?"

Why should he struggle to free himself now? For even as he wrestled with the ropes, even as he was freeing himself, he felt himself lifted in the air. Roth had the bag on his shoulder; there was a moment of dizzy uncertainty, and then Mac was pitched into the sea.

CHAPTER TWENTY

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

"I MUST die!"

That was the thought that suddenly blazed like lightning in Mac's mind. Until then he had not felt how necessary it was that he live. What would Brand do if Mac did not return? He must be apprised of what had passed on the tugboat.

Faster than a bullet these thoughts coursed through the mind of the young Irishman. No selfish thoughts goaded him; it was not the instinct of self-preservation, it was pure loyalty to Brand.

Before Roth had lifted the bag to his shoulder Mac was practically free of the ropes. Before the bag had been thrown into the ocean he had secured his pen-knife and was struggling to open it.

Then came the shock; the inrush of the cold water, and the dropping lower and lower; it seemed for ages. Like a man possessed, Mac struggled. He clutched that pen-knife hysterically, fearful he would drop it and lose it; he got the long blade open at last, and then he raised his hand.

With short, desperate strokes he ripped the rotten sides of the old bag until it flapped in shreds, and then, spreading wide his arms with the instinct of the trained swimmer, he began to rise.

Up through the cold, green waters he came. The waves caught him in a welcoming embrace and lifted him. Higher and higher he rose, until he began to wonder, in his weariness, if he would never reach the top.

Suddenly his head shot above the surface. The free air bathed his face, and the calm stars blinked him a welcome back to life. At once he struck out. With sturdy strokes, stimulated by new hope, he began swimming against the rough waves, but when he had seen around him, the bewildering expanse of dark waters were enough to take all hope from his heart.

And then Mac saw the one, the only, the slender chance he had to save his life; the ghostly, gleaming lights far to his left could have but one meaning. They were the lights of the Blue Triangle tug. Soon it would be turning, reversing its course and steaming back to port, its evil task accomplished.

If Mac were to return to Brand and to life, there was but one way; he must get back on the tug from which he had been thrown.

Mac had come to the surface less than fifty yards from the tug. There was no question that he had not been seen. There was no moon; the night was dark; the tug itself was only a faint and misty outline against the deep-blue blackground of the horizon.

Determined to do or die, Mac swam toward the tug. As he came very near he could make out the tall figure of Roth, standing near the wheelhouse, watching the waves. Mac judged correctly that he was remaining near the scene long enough to see if the bag stayed below or floated back to the surface.

Mac fought his way around to the other side of the boat. There, to his great joy, he saw, dangling from the side, a piece of painter line which had not been pulled in. This was his salvation. It would have been practically an impossibility for him, in his exhausted condition, to have climbed aboard the pitching tug without that friendly line. As it was, it was a terrible ordeal. The breath was practically knocked from his body, and his grasp was weak and trembling as he clambered to the deck.

There he dropped in a little heap. He was incapable for that instant of moving another step forward. If Roth or Higgs had come upon him then, he would have been at their mercy. He had reached the limit of his endurance, and his strength was gone from him utterly. He lay looking up at the stars and offering prayers.

Then he heard Roth give an order, and, as Higgs stumbled below, the former re-entered the wheelhouse. Presently they were getting under way; the tug leaped forward like a steed flecked with a whip; it gathered itself together and away it sped through the wind-swept darkness like a phantom of the sea.

Roth was at the wheel and Higgs was at the engine. And Mac, dripping and worn out on the cold, dark deck, wondered what he would do next.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IN COMMAND

MEN like Paddy MacPortland never wait for circumstances.

They never lie low and wait for things to develop unless they can't do anything else. Their success in life is due to the fact that they are the captains of their own souls; that they force circumstances and opportunities to suit their own convenience. In doing this they generally come out on top.

This was exactly the case with Mac now. If he had lain on the deck there long enough, he most certainly would have been discovered; probably he would have been thrown overboard again, and assuredly he had not strength enough left to give battle to Roth or his engineer.

He realized, therefore, that he must move quickly. In his present precarious predicament he knew that he had a fighting chance, for Roth could not well leave the wheel for any length of time, and certainly Higgs had his hands full in the engine-room. And Mac was for the time being master of the situation because he knew all about his enemies, while they thought he had gone to Davy Jones' locker.

At first the idea of suddenly appearing before Roth, as if he were a ghost, occurred to Mac, but this he quickly abandoned. Roth might be frightened at such a sight, but Mac figured he would not be too frightened to fire a bullet at the supposed apparition. Mac was defenseless, so far as weapons were concerned, and he could afford to take no unnecessary risks.

Then a more feasible plan occurred to him. By this plan he saw a way open to capture the Blue Triangle tug single-handed, and himself take her back into port; back into the police wharf, where he could hand the precious crew of villains over to the tender mercies of the police. It will thus be seen that Mac was rapidly becoming his old wild self again; that, despite his experiences, his weakness was leaving him, and that he didn't mean to be an invalid on that deck very long.

Mac rose carefully to his feet. They were still riding on the dark ocean, and the tug was rocking so that he was forced to walk with the utmost care to preserve his balance. But Mac had been a wharf rat when he was a boy; he knew as much about boats as he did about baseball, which was going some, and he kept his poise with the skill of an old seaman.

The wheelhouse door was open. Creeping to its edge, Mac peered around. There he saw Roth handling the wheel with the assurance of a veteran and actually whistling. He was whistling a patriotic song as if the attempted murder he had just committed had been a pious act. The callous indifference the man displayed angered Mac to the core. He could forgive anything but that whistle.

Like a panther he crouched in the shadows and crept up the one step and in behind the man at the wheel; then he leaped through the air. He landed on the shoulders of the pilot; he beat his bare fists on the man's head; he pounded him with all the strength remaining in his arms, striking him blow after blow, until Roth, with a little moan, dropped senseless.

Mac glanced quickly around him. The first part of his plan had succeeded; he must not hesitate now. Just behind him was a door, which he opened. It let into the cabin of the captain—a tiny place with a bunk in it. Mac

dragged the body of Roth into this place and threw him on the bunk. Then he made a quick search to see if there were any weapons about. There was none in the cabin, but he found a revolver in Roth's hip-pocket, which he quickly removed.

Then the young investigator found the key to the cabin in another pocket of his prisoner. He locked him in his own cabin, and then breathed a sigh of relief. His most dangerous enemy was helpless.

What to do with Higgs was the next question.

"Why should I bother with him?" Mac asked himself. "If I capture him I've got nobody below to work. Let him go ahead and fire for me. He'll be busy until we dock, and then he'll have a nice little surprise coming to him."

The capture of Roth had been effected in practically complete silence. It was certain that Higgs thought all secure above, and that no trouble was to be anticipated from him. So, quite confident that the worst of his troubles were over, Mac took the wheel and guided the Blue Triangle on her course homeward.

And though he was very tired, Mac whistled, too. His whistle was a kind of camouflage for Higgs, but it was also a relief for his overburdened heart. But he did not whistle the martial air that Roth had chosen. He whistled "The Wearin' o' the Green."

Meanwhile they were scooting along, homeward bound.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE LAST IN THE WORLD

GORDON BRAND for the first time in his career faced ignominious defeat.

And for the first time in his career he felt the urge of a new passion which must goad him on until he won, no matter what the odds. It stunned him.

His face was drawn and haggard as he turned to confront his two dumbfounded assistants, who had read Laggis' queer doggerel over his shoulder. Not knowing what Brand knew, they could not understand the full purport of the message which the investigator had just received, but they saw the trouble on his countenance. They saw that a body-blow had been dealt their chief.

"What does it mean, Mr. Brand?" asked Russell.

Listlessly he fingered a batch of mail and telegrams before he answered. His brows were contracted, his hair tangled and disarranged, the corners of his mouth drawn down in deep furrows of resolution.

"It means that Enid—our Enid—has been kidnaped!" he said brokenly. "And kidnaped by a more dangerous creature than you can hope to imagine; the very last of her kind in the world, I am beginning to believe. Boys, I want to be alone. You have done a good day's work, both of you. Now go home! Be ready for a summons if I need you, but I do not think I shall need you again to-day. All I can tell you now is that the case of Pertelevitch Rogden has suddenly assumed a very much graver significance in the abduction of my secretary. The death of Rogden is a far less serious matter to me than that. There are forces now which we are fighting that so far I have not been able to understand. I must be alone."

As they closed the outer door behind them Brand locked it. He shot forward the big bolt which he had had placed there. Then, standing in the middle of the floor, he raised his fist, his face dark with settled purpose, and said between clenched teeth:

"Laggis! You've gone too far. This moment I pick up your trail. This moment I consecrate my life to find you and rescue the girl I love from your clutch."

Thus Brand admitted the truth to himself. He had been suspecting it since the day he first set eyes on Enid, but now that she was gone, now that she was in danger, he knew.

The investigator was about to enter his laboratory when a thought stayed his hand on the knob. There were telegrams on his desk; probably those from Washington which he had been expecting. He would look at them before undertaking the work which he had mapped out in his mind.

As he opened one telegram he saw that it was from his Washington branch, and read as follows:

"*Re* Rogden: Find he was under suspicion by the United States Secret Service as an agent of the enemy. His credentials were being investigated. Theory is held here that, while really representing the German espionage force, he pretended to be in sympathy with both factions of the Russian revolutionists in this country, and was manipulating the Russian situation from the United States in the interests of his employers. He was known to be associated with Victor Fein, who is an avowed opponent of the Russian premier. May have more information about him later. Fein has engaged transportation to New York this afternoon."

Brand's keen eyes danced in momentary pleasure at this.

"It worked!" he told himself happily. "It worked! Now if we can just put our finger on Laggis as easily as that, we will have done something worth while."

The investigator went now to his safe and drew forth the relics, the evidence given him in the singular case on which his whole interest was centered now. He secured the lock of hair which he had cut from the head of his doomed client the day before. With this, and the blue triangle Rogden had found on his bed, and other trinkets, he went into his laboratory.

Here Brand, the investigator, underwent an instant metamorphosis. He became Brand, the scientist. Here, amid the apparatus of the research student who delved into the deepest mysteries of nature, he became an entirely different man.

With the intent stare of one whose entire mental resources are concentrated on one problem, to the exclusion of everything else in the world, he made his preparations for the test. He made up his mind first to find what preparation had been used to change the color of Rogden's hair.

"If I find that, I shall be a step nearer to you, Enid," he said. "And to you, Laggis!" he added vindicatively.

Quickly he assembled his apparatus. His beakers, his test tubes, his Bunsen burners, his Florence flasks, his retorts, and the bottles of acids which he should need in subjecting the lock of hair to the analysis which he proposed to make. It would be no easy matter to extract the secret hidden in those strands of white hair. Indeed, it might prove impossible, after all. Hours, most certainly, would be required. Inwardly Brand groaned as he realized it might require days.

Hour after hour sped by while he labored. The sunlight that cast a diagonal beam across the shelves, laden with bottles, slanted across the floor, grew shorter and shorter, and finally withdrew altogether. Shadows came out like gray ghosts to take its place. Still Brand toiled and waited; long waits of sickening suspense and then eager activity, to be succeeded by more waiting and more disappointment. And at last despair.

Brand held up a test-tube half-filled with yellow liquid. He made a final test and learned nothing. With a despairing little cry he hurled the test-tube to the floor, and it broke into a thousand pieces.

"Laggis!" he cried. "Devil-woman, what have you done?"

He beat his fist into his open palm.

"The twisted foot, the gray hair, the withered hand!" he cried. "What natural explanation can be given for such miracles as these? And now the abduction! If I could but know as potent a magic to wield against you, Laggis!"

He stopped to listen. There was a furious ringing of his office door-bell, a clamorous beating and knocking at

the door. Pale and disheveled, he went to the door and opened it.

MacPortland, a sorry, bedraggled figure, staggered in.

"Quick!" he cried. "Quick, chief! We've just got time!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

A DASH of brandy, fresh clothes, which Brand insisted always be kept ready in his office, and Paddy MacPortland smiled back bravely at his chief and told him he was "fit as a fiddle" again.

"You just sit down and listen, chief," pleaded Mac. "Begorra, but I've got some yarn to spin, and I've got to spin it quick!"

Then, with the precision and clearness of a trained reporter, Mac rapidly related in chronological sequence all the amazing adventures that had befallen him since he had rushed out of Brand's offices early in the morning. He emphasized to Brand the knowledge that he had gained — the trial of Berenice, her escape, the fact that Rogden was a spy, and the news that Fein was on his way to Washington — instead of expanding on his own hazards. But Brand insisted that he be more explict. He insisted until Mac had described all that had happened in detail, and even the danger-hardened Brand was thrilled as he listened to Mac's description, in his picturesque language, of all that he had endured.

The prisoners were lined up against the wall in the inspector's office.

"They shall pay!" said Brand over and over again. "They shall pay!"

Mac completed his story quickly, and Brand listened intently till the end.

"After I had locked Roth in the captain's cabin," he said, "I headed for the police wharf, and I found it without any throuble at all, at all. The bloke down-stairs niver bothered me a lick. I found Sergeant Flaherty on duty with three or four other gintlemen, and I told them to charge Roth and Higgs with ivery crime and misdemeanor on the calendar, and I could prove it on them. They're waiting in the station-house now."

Brand rose and placed his hand kindly on the shoulder of his brave young assistant.

"Mac, you're a real guy," he said earnestly. "You've helped a lot, and don't you think I'll forget it."

"Aw, cut it, chief," begged Mac.

Brand glanced at his watch. He figured that, if Fein's train were on time, he would reach the Hotel Rembrandt within three-quarters of an hour. It was more than likely, however, that, under war-time conditions, the train would be considerably late, and so he was sure they had plenty of time. The investigator was swiftly mapping his plans. They were fairly well outlined. Their success depended upon one thing—whether Fein had learned in the meantime that Rogden had been killed. If he went to the Hotel Rembrandt expecting to find Rogden there, as Brand had tried to make him do, then all would be well; but if Victor Fein learned that Rogden was dead, the jig was up. The only thing to do was to fix the clerk at the Hotel Rembrandt, and trust the rest to Providence.

Brand went to the telephone and called up the Hotel Rembrandt.

"Let me talk to Colonel Blackstone," he told the operator, and presently he was rewarded by hearing the soothing tones of the colonel saying "Hello!" into his ear.

"Colonel Blackstone," clicked Brand decisively, "I am about to turn a big trick in this Rogden case, and I need your help."

"Indeed!" purred the colonel amiably. "You interest me very deeply, Mr. Brand. And you may count on my co-operation to the very limit of my ability in the matter."

"Very well, colonel. I have not the time to explain the reason for all I ask just now, but I promise to do so as soon as the occasion offers, I assure you. Meanwhile, please have these things done. Within an hour or so a man will apply at your registration desk and ask to see Mr. Rogden. Please tell your clerk not to act as if he were surprised. Tell him merely to reply that Mr. Rogden is not at the hotel, but that, if the caller is Mr. Fein, he has a message for him from Rogden. The caller *will* be Mr. Fein. Tell him Rogden left word for Fein to meet him, he knew where, as soon as he arrived. Just that and nothing more. Then I should like the courtesy of two chairs in your private office, just behind the registration counter, and if you will order us two big dinners right away, I shall be completely in your indebtedness."

Brand could mentally picture the bland, sarcastic smile under the colonel's long, imperious white mustaches.

"Mr. Brand," said the colonel coolly, "you may count

upon me to do all that you say. Come around any time; everything will be ready. I am always glad to see Mr. Brand."

Then both men hung up their receivers. Brand turned to Mac with a smile, saying: "We will now go around to the Rembrandt."

They soon reached the Rembrandt. Outside there was a string of waiting taxicabs, and Brand approached the driver of one, the one at the extreme end of the line. He held a few moments' conversation that Mac did not hear, then the two men entered the hotel.

Colonel Blackstone came forward from the desk to receive them. He was resplendent in a full-dress suit of new and fashionable cut; from his eyeglasses dangled a black silk cord, braided in white, and he carried himself with a luxurious, leisurely air that impressed all the guests in the lobby. He was the very pink of elegant old age, and was glowing with urbanity. He saluted them with old-fashioned graciousness.

"Good-evening, gentlemen!" he cried. "Come into my parlor——"

"Said the spider to the fly," broke in Brand, completing the quotation with a meaning intonation that made the colonel blink. "Have you attended to everything, colonel?"

"Everything! Everything!" the colonel answered in silken tones. "Come right in."

The colonel had certainly done everything in his power to please. In his private office a table had been brought and covers laid for two. Neither Brand nor Mac had realized how famished they really were until they sat down to the appetizing meal which the colonel had ordered, and they fell to on his viands with a will.

But it was not given them to finish the meal, hungry though they were. Half an hour after they had arrived at the hotel, through the door of the little office in which they sat they heard a voice, with a strong foreign accent, addressing the clerk. "I should like that you should say to Mr. Rogden I should like to see him," it said.

"Are you Mr. Fein?" asked the well-tutored clerk quite calmly.

"Mr. Fein? Am I Mr. Fein? For why you ask me if I am Mr. Fein? Call Mr. Rogden! That is enough for you."

"Mr. Rogden is not in the hotel," answered the clerk patiently and quite truthfully. Mr. Rogden was at the morgue. "But he left a message for Mr. Fein," added the clerk. "That's why I asked you."

"What's he said?" asked Fein with sour politeness. "He left word that if you called you were to meet him at once at a place you knew well."

Fein uttered a blasphemous word and brought his open palm violently down on the desk.

"I'm a sick man! Rogden is a fool!" spluttered Fein wrathfully. "Are you sure he ain't in yet?"

"Perfectly sure," returned the clerk with some asperity. "Is there anything else you want?"

"Yes. I want to break your neck!" exploded Fein, and Brand, watching him through the narrow slit, saw him start off across the lobby. His practised eye saw something else. He saw the red-headed bellboy, whom he had observed before, and who had been lingering near the desk, go over to a window and shoot up a curtain. Brand was certain it was a signal.

Brand beckoned Mac. With apparent leisure the two men stepped into the lobby and walked across to the door. They watched Fein call a taxicab despatcher and engage a machine. The car which Brand had secured was the last in the line of waiting machines. The two investigators walked down toward it slowly, as if they were in no especial hurry about anything.

"He's leading us to Rogden's dearest secrets," exulted Brand to Mac, as they watched Fein enter a taxi. "We're picking up the trail at last."

He and Mac stepped into the car they had engaged. Obedient to Brand's earlier instructions, the chauffeur set out in slow pursuit of the auto ahead of them, in which Fein rode alone. Brand and Mac kept a close watchout for any other car leaving at the same time, but saw none. If the Blue Triangle crowd were around, they had made themselves invisible.

Brand reached in his pocket and drew forth two objects which he passed to Mac with the brief comment that they might come in useful. And Mac tucked them away without a word. They were automatic revolvers.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

AT LAST!

THOUGH Brand felt certain that Fein had no idea he was being followed, he determined to take no chances. He and Mac took turns at watching the machine ahead.

Mac had looked only for a minute or two when he declared there was a machine keeping an even distance between them all the time, but never dropping out of sight.

"The Blue Triangle!" said Brand grimly. "We're going to be up against odds, Mac, old boy. The next thing I expect to see is Laggis go riding by the window astraddle of a broom."

By this time they had reached a bridge and were bounding over it at a fast clip. Reaching the settlement at the other side, they plunged through a maze of small streets, finally emerging to a smooth road which led northward, with open farmlands to right and left.

Suddenly the car stopped with a jolt, and Brand quickly opened the door and looked out. The chauffeur had followed Brand's instructions implicitly. Fein's car had halted, far up the road, and the second car had instantly followed suit. Brand and Mac jumped thankfully to the roadway, for the long chase had worn on them both.

Then the two men crept forward through the gloom. Their cautious approach did not delay their speed so much, and in a very few moments Brand and Mac found themselves nearing Fein's machine.

"Careful!" cautioned Brand as they moved on. They saw that Fein's taxi had stopped just below the old-fashioned gate of an ancient burial ground, and that Fein was out of the machine and talking to the chauffeur.

Hidden in the shadows, they tried to catch what was being said. It was evident that Fein was insisting that the chauffeur remain where he was and wait for him.

"You vait here, now, I say; don't you go running avay when I go in dere; I got business in dot place, but I von't be long; don't you run avay from me; you be here ven I come out yet to take me back; don't you leave me, now, understand? You stay here. Stop shaking your head. I don't trust nobody. Say yes, can't you?"

Neither Brand nor Mac could hear the chauffeur's reply, but his answer evidently reassured Fein, who turned and passed through the cemetery gate. He was walking with great speed, as if his task were far from agreeable, and he was very anxious to get it over with.

Brand was afraid they would attract the attention of the chauffeur if they followed, and yet he was certain they would lose valuable time if they attempted to get over that wall without being observed.

This difficulty, however, solved itself automatically. No sooner had Fein disappeared than the chauffeur took matters into his own hands. He lit his pipe and then climbed into the cab interior, banging the door shut behind him.

Fein was walking quickly down a long straight path arched with trees, and they set out, walking briskly, so as to decrease the distance between them and their man and thus lessen the chances of losing him. The night was breezy, clear and bracing, and the place as silent as the skeletons buried in its soil. The effect on Brand was instantaneous, and even Mac was affected. The strange nature of the mission on which they were bent; the suspicion, amounting almost to a certainty, that the Blue Triangle conspirators were also skulking among the tombstones, the low murmuring of the wind, the glistening monuments, the shadowy trees, worked miracles on their imagination.

Not fifty yards away they saw Fein, still strutting ahead

at a great pace. He had begun to whistle, as if his nerves in such a place needed musical encouragement.

Presently he stopped. He had come to a little railed burial lot with a single headstone within the enclosure. The gate to this was open and Fein stepped inside.

Now Brand and Mac closed in quickly. They darted over the soggy ground, they stumbled across unmarked graves, darting in and out of head and foot stones, until they found themselves, safe from Fein's observation, behind a great tree immediately in front of where he stood.

Just then the moon came out from behind great clumps of cloud. It cast its radiance over all the place, and Fein's lone figure stood out in bold relief against its light. They saw Fein glance around him nervously. In all directions he looked apprehensively, and then he called softly:

"Rogden! Rogden! Where are you, Rogden? I'm here; Fein, vaiting."

But there was no answer save the moaning wind. The moonlight struck the single headstone within the burial lot where Fein stood waiting; the letters carved there stood out in bold relief, and Brand and Mac were given a shock. The letters of stone spelled the name Rogden.

Then Brand remembered what Rogden had told him. He remembered Rogden had spoken of his mother; of how she had come with him to this country and then had died. This, then, was her burial place.

Fein grew more and more impatient. He clapped his hands together and cried *"Gott in Himmel!"* over and over again. At length a fit of resolution came over him, and he addressed the empty air indignantly:

"Vy not?" he said. "It's now or later, and later may be harder. I got to tell him vat I t'ink. I get de papers and the gold first. Rogden, maybe you should be here on time!"

After that things happened so quickly Brand always had trouble getting them in their proper sequence.

He saw Fein turn and fall to his knees beside the grave. He saw him run his hands over the letters forming the name Rogden. He saw him push the letter "d," saw it depress under his touch, and then a miracle. The top of the tombstone opened like a door, revealing an interior lined and furnished like a safe. Fein put his hand far down in the interior and drew forth a batch of papers.

Before he could put them in his pocket pandemonium broke loose. Men started up from the shadows at every hand. Men were here and men were there, and all of them struggling to get at Michael Fein. There were men whom Brand and Mac recognized, even in that wild excitement, and other men who gave these battle. Graffery was there and Leyder and Grimes, but these three were opposed by strangers who fought like devils.

From their hidden posts the two looked on in wonder. And then they saw a new manifestation, infinitely more surprising than what had already come to pass. A figure stepped from the shadows; the figure of a woman, a figure which Brand had come to recognize and almost to fear.

She put forth both her hands, and two of the strange men stopped fighting and passed to her all the papers which Fein had taken from the tombstone. She dropped them into a satchel which she carried. And while the men held back Graffery and his astonished friends, she emptied the tombstone of all that was left and hurried off down the roadway.

Brand did not wait. Without a word to Mac he rushed off across the field of graves with fingers aching to catch this creature and hold her to the light. She should not escape him now, he vowed.

Laggis was making straight for the cemetery gate. As she neared it a man stepped out of the shadows and, with a wave of his hand, turned and leaped to the driver's seat of the same magnificent limousine in which Laggis had escaped from Brand the night before. The witch rushed to the machine, leaped in and banged the door. The automobile turned and darted off.

But not too quickly for Brand. As it had turned he leaped on the mud-guard and held fast. He drew his revolver and then he threw open the door. He held his revolver before him and cried:

"Laggis! You are Gordon Brand's prisoner at last!"

To his surprise she laughed at him—a rippling, silvery laugh, totally unlike the voice of the witch as he had heard it before. He put his head forward and stared at her face, and then nearly fell fainting to the roadway.

It was Enid Starr.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

FLY AWAY, WITCH!

BRAND'S hand steadied on his revolver, while the other held tightly to the swinging, lurching door.

"You must be an insane woman!" he gasped. "You must explain to me here and now, and you are going back with me to my office at once. And this pistol will make your chauffeur go where I tell him to."

"Brave Mr. Brand," she said. "He covers a poor, weak woman with a pistol."

Brand's teeth clicked together angrily.

"I have been played for a fool!" he cried accusingly, "but I mean to find out in what way, you may rest assured of that, Miss Starr. I shall find out if you had any sensible human motive for such outlandish tricks in such dangerous circumstances as you have seen fit to play. You are in my power now. You have got to explain. I will give you one minute to agree to tell me why you have done all this; if you then refuse, you will have to make your explanations to the police, and I wish to spare you the humiliation of that."

"I've amusing company on my ride to-night," was all the comment that she would make.

Brand now entered and took a seat.

"Take the little speaking tube there and signal the chauffeur!" Brand commanded sternly.

"Signal him? To do what?" she asked; but there was new trouble in her voice which took the sting of its old taunt away.

"Tell him to drive to Mr. Brand's office at once," he replied.

Now Enid, so changed by the garments of the witch, and the make-up on her face, leaned forward smiling.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" she said with a feeble and pathetic attempt at her old taunting revelry. "Look where he wants me to go! Mr. Brand loves Laggis not. No! No! No!"

"If I have to break that window-glass there, point this revolver at your chauffeur's head and keep it there until he does reach my office, I'll do it," Brand told her. "I shall stand no more trifling!"

"No? No more trifling? Then, Mr. Brand, neither will I. Enid Starr and Laggis, too, are tired of your trifling. Put your weapon up. You laugh at me, but I am mightier than you. Your weapon means nothing against my power. I can make you do my will!"

"Witchcraft!" cried Brand scornfully. "You fake witch! What spells can you put on me? Make my hair turn gray, make my hand wither, make me relax my determination to take you to my office! I defy you!"

"Very well, Mr. Brand," she said, a little wearily he thought. "You force me to show you that the witch you hated so much is more powerful than you."

She lifted a little flap of her waist and exposed something that glittered like a golden star.

It was the badge of the Secret Service.

Enid Starr was Laggis, the witch, and Laggis, the witch, was a government Secret Service agent.

With an odd tremble in his voice, and removing his hat, the investigator said: "Miss Starr, you told the truth. I am here, ready to do your will. I am entirely at your service. I am through. I have found not the slightest clue which led me to Laggis, the witch; I made not one step forward when I tried to rescue you, when I believed you were in the hands of the witch!"

"Why, Mr. Brand, you *did* win. If you found out Rogden's murderer, you succeeded on every hand. You did

catch me, after all; you did find out who I was, and you *could* have made me go to your rooms, even after I told you what I was. I hope, Mr. Brand, this will not injure our friendship, and that you won't call me Miss Starr again," said Enid.

"I feel very much an ass, Enid," replied Brand.

Ages afterward—so it seemed to these two in the machine—the car drew up before an imposing gray stone building which Brand recognized as the place where the government's agents had their headquarters.

As Enid Starr was assisted from the automobile by Brand, she carried the satchel in which she had placed the treasures removed from the tombstone. A man hurried down the steps and approached her with a certain deferential eagerness. As if utterly worn out and cast down, she passed him the satchel. Then she turned and, with an eager gesture, asked Brand to come nearer.

"This is Gordon Brand, Inspector Holmes," she said. "Mr. Brand is one of the most wonderful men in the world. He has actually succeeded in solving the secret of the Rogden murder."

Inspector Holmes turned to Brand with lifted eyebrows. "Then who murdered Rogden?" he asked.

Before Brand could reply a chain of three automobiles rounded up at the sidewalk, and as they came to a halt men leaped to the sidewalk. Presently they began assisting handcuffed prisoners to the street. For all his weariness and depression, Brand could not help smiling at the strange array of captives which the Secret Service deputies assembled and marched in single file up to the steps before the chief.

First in line, manacled, but grinning at the joke, was Paddy MacPortland. He had found it impossible to keep out of the scrimmage there in the graveyard, and had been overpowered by the government men while trying to help them. Behind Mac marched the mouthing, blaspheming Graffery, and with him was Leyder, very pale and peaked, and the majestic Grimes, who wore the air of a martyr. In the rear, indignant and threatening, was Victor Fein.

But Inspector Holmes had no time for parleying. He gave a few brief directions and the entire party, prisoners, detectives, Brand and Enid, followed the inspector into his private office. There the prisoners were lined up against the wall, closely guarded, and the others were seated.

Inspector Holmes then turned to Brand.

"If you have any information regarding the murder of Rogden," he began briskly, "this department will consider it a very great favor if you will assist us. If Rogden's murderer is at large, it is exceedingly important that we know that fact. Can you help us?"

Brand shook his head in agreement and waited for a moment. Then he cast his eyes up and down the line of prisoners. "The murderer is in this room," he answered.

The inspector came a step closer. "Who is it?" he said pleadingly.

Brand pointed an accusing finger at the last man in the line. "There is the murderer of Pertelevitch Rogden!" he said. He was pointing at the shaking, terror-stricken Victor Fein.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE WITCHING HOUR

IT was midnight.

Grimes, of the red whiskers; Higgs, the engineer; Roth, the giant seaman; the sleek Leyder, together with the snarling Graffery, comprising the leaders of the Blue Triangle, and Victor Fein, from whom a confession of the murder of Pertelevitch Rogden had been obtained within five minutes after Brand's accusation, were in the custody of government officials. Every one of them had offended the government laws, and for every one of them there were heavy sentences waiting.

In the private dining-room of the Hotel Rembrandt a happy little party of three were gathered. Enid Starr was the queen of the little dinner. To her right sat Gordon Brand, to her left was Paddy MacPortland. Before them was a dainty supper which had been ordered the moment they set foot in the lobby by the suave and courtly Colonel Blackstone.

"Before we gobble up this tempting little supper," said Brand a little uneasily, "there is one matter which is causing me some concern. Berenice Patterson fled from that Blue Triangle tug and nobody seems to have heard of her since then. I wonder where that poor girl is?"

Enid smiled at him radiantly. "I know," she said simply. "Berenice is enjoying a happy evening with her poor old mother in their home on Garland avenue."

Brand dropped his knife and fork energetically. "The time has come for explanations," he declared.

He then lit a cigar and began:

"My own story is not a difficult one to understand, and it will not take long to tell. No man can go into a room and murder another man and go away without leaving some damning evidences behind him.

"When I found Rogden dead I knew of but two enemies he had in the world. One was an old devil-woman about whom he had told me, who had cast a spell on him, as he believed, when he was in Poland. The other was Laggis, the witch. At one time I was inclined to believe them one and the same person.

"On beginning my search I was forced to the conclusion that there had been no one in that room when I rapped on the door. Yet the three facts remained: I had heard a woman's voice behind that door. I had found Rogden murdered on the floor. I had found the key in his pocket.

"What did my common sense tell me then? It told me certainly that a man who had a duplicate key had entered the room, waited for Rogden, slain him, locked the door and escaped. Who was close enough to Rogden to get a chance to have a duplicate key made? These surmises were later found to be correct.

"I believed that a woman had put her head out of the window of the room above Rogden's and cried and laughed, as I had heard, and the wall across the way had deflected the sound in through Rogden's window. Thus the illusion was created of the sound coming from Rogden's room.

"I found two important things in Rogden's pockets: One was a newspaper, containing the announcement that the Russian's engagement to Berenice Patterson had been broken. The other was a newly written telegram, in cipher, which I copied.

"Then I learned that Berenice Patterson had been the last caller at Rogden's door. The condition of the body had made me believe, however, that Rogden had been killed before she got there. The inference was, then, that she had rapped at his door, but had gotten no answer. Could it have been Berenice Patterson who made those cries from the window up-stairs? When I learned that Graffery and his friends had been in that room at the time of the crime, a fair idea of the part Berenice Patterson had played in the game began to shape itself in my mind.

"One of the things that really puzzled me were footprints which I found on the ceiling." Here Enid smiled a little warily. "That," she explained, "was to have been the next spell with which to terrify Rogden. He died before it was promised him." Then Brand continued:

"But I am anticipating. That was next morning. I made an examination of the wound in Rogden's neck. It showed clearly that the knife had entered at the base of the neck in the rear, and that the point of the blade had emerged from the upper part of the front of the throat. This could have but one meaning. If you will give the subject a moment's thought you will see that only a man considerably shorter than Rogden could have dealt him such a blow. This deduction aided me considerably. Although the presence of the Blue Triangle crowd, whom I soon found to be new enemies of Rogden, in the room above pointed dark suspicion at them, there was only one short man among them, and that was Leyder, and Leyder is too weak to have dealt such a blow.

"I sent a wire to my Washington representative at once, telling them to find out all they could about Rogden and Victor Fein, including a personal description of the latter. Then, Enid, we had our memorable meeting opposite the Red Garter Café the night you appropriated my limousine license for the back of the car. Who was that you got to hold me while you talked?"

"Two Secret Service deputies," she confessed. "What did you do after I got away from your old taxi?"

Here Brand described his experiences at the Patterson home, culminating in his being ordered from the house by the enraged Graffery, and how, on his return to his office, he had been given the dagger by Laggis.

"The knife proved to be an important clue, for it had a Washington maker's name on it.

"This I indexed mentally while I proceeded to decipher the cryptic message. After about half an hour I succeeded in untangling the message. It was a very childish affair, that cipher. It was addressed to Fein, and it earnestly protested Rogden's innocence of any wrongdoing.

"This indicated friction. In the light of what we know now it is evident that Fein had learned of Rogden's alliance with the Blue Triangle, which made it plain to Fein that Rogden was playing hot and cold with both sides. Fein had believed in Rogden and trusted him implicitly, and Fein was working about big plans for the royalist end of the Russian political game. Rogden's ostensible mission to this country was to confer with Fein and his supporters. Rogden was a clever man, but he could not play this game very long without being detected. The Blue Triangle got word from Russia of what he was, and Fein learned it through some channel or other.

"Fein sent an excited message to Rogden by wire accusing him of being a traitor. This wire I have seen—that is, a duplicate—through the courtesy of the telegraph company officials. Now, mark what happened. Fein went home on the pretense of being ill and went to his room. Ostensibly from eleven o'clock yesterday morning until eight this morning he did not leave his apartment. As a matter of fact, he did this as a blind; slipped out without attracting any one's attention and boarded a train for New York.

"Fein reached this city. In his pocket he had a duplicate key to Rogden's room; in his heart there was murder. Instead of riding up in an elevator, he walked up to the seventh floor and went straight to Rogden's room. I assumed, in working out my theory, that he went in and found the room empty; that he crouched in the dark until Rogden came in, and then sprang upon him.

"The window was open; he impetuously and thoughtlessly threw the knife from him, and it fell in the alley below, and then he rushed out of the room, pausing only to lock the door behind him.

"The leaders of the Blue Triangle, having learned that Rogden was really their enemy, had also determined to get him.

"We have established the time that Roth, Leyder, Graffery and Grimes gathered in the room on the eighth floor. They—I am reasoning, assuming, not stating what I actually *know* to be true—placed one man on guard at the foot of the stairs on the seventh floor. He was to apprise the others when Rogden entered the room. By the time the sentinel took his post Rogden had been killed and Fein was back at the railroad station. Then another coincidence.

"Berenice Patterson—wherever she had been before that, a mystery only Enid can unravel—suddenly gets out of the elevator, goes to Rogden's door and raps on it. Of course there is no response. But the sentinel—probably Leyder—sees her, and as a result the unhappy girl is a prisoner in the room on the eighth floor in a very few minutes. Suddenly Leyder returns with the news that Rogden must have been killed, as he had seen blood trickling from under his door. Berenice rushed to the window, screaming, moaning, sobbing and laughing hysterically, just as I got to Rogden's door and was rapping there.

"During the excitement that followed the murder the party on the eighth floor managed to get away without attracting attention, and Graffery returned to the house on Garland avenue with Berenice practically his prisoner.

"After I had followed him there, and had returned to my offices, where Laggis gave me the dagger, I set to work on the cryptogram, and when I understood it I decided to send it as if Rogden were still alive, and in order to humbug Fein I added a line in the same cipher stating that anarchists had tried to knife 'me,' but that it had proved only a flesh wound, but that Fein had better come to New York at once and arrange to take over all papers as 'I' was leaving.

"There was one other mysterious feature of the affair which for a while quite baffled me. I saw two footprints on Rogden's ceiling. I tried to establish their connection with this chain of events, but failed. Then I concluded——"

He looked at Enid. She smiled at him teasingly.

"You concluded that it was just another of Laggis' tricks?" she asked. "Well, that was true. Meaning to puzzle Rogden, I arranged that trick last week. But Laggis worked her strange plan for a good purpose, as you shall see."

Then Brand and Mac settled back to hear the real truth about Laggis, the witch.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

LAGGIS UNVEILED

"I HAVE been in the Secret Service five years," said Enid. "When about a year ago Rogden and an old woman, whom he introduced as his mother, came to this country we were warned by our operatives abroad to watch him.

"What we hoped to do was to get his papers; the papers that would show who were in his employ in this country; the papers that would betray some of our domestic spies.

"It was difficult for any of us in the service to get anything on Rogden until one day I learned accidentally of his attentions to Berenice Patterson. That was the beginning of our real work. I gained her confidence slowly, but at last she confessed a great deal to me. She admitted that she did not love Rogden, and that she had consented to marry him only because of the pressure brought to bear on her by her stepbrother, Graffery. One day she came to me with a story about Rogden's being always afraid of old women because an old woman in Poland had put a curse on him; that he was superstitious.

"That gave me my plan. We had searched every article Rogden had with him in his hotels many times and found nothing. Now I meant to make him *tell* me his hiding-place by playing on the only weakness I believe the man had.

"The first man I went to was dear old Colonel Blackstone. I have known him a long time, and I took him considerably into my confidence. I took up my residence in this hotel under Colonel Blackstone's protection; I installed one of our young operatives as a bell-boy.

"I determined to put a number of spells on Rogden, and then to get him alone, under some dramatic conditions, and force him on threats of punishments more horrible than he had ever dreamed of to show me where his papers and his gold were hidden.

"All this was planned months before it was put into actual execution. I was determined that nothing should fail. Then to clear myself, as many people knew me through my association with the government work, I resigned, ostensibly, from the Secret Service. I looked around for work in a congenial line, and found it in the vacancy in your office.

"Then I was ready. I first smoked a plate and put the message on it, and my bell-boy friend sneaked it into Rogden's room. I had learned of the Blue Triangle through Berenice, and so I put a Blue Triangle on every-

thing just to make it all the more incomprehensible to Rogden.

"The first spell, the spell of the twisted foot, was a very daring experiment. Jerry, the bell-boy, put some grease on the bottom of one of Rogden's shoes during his absence and then depressed a board in the flooring of his room. As I had hoped, when Rogden got up and started across the floor the next morning he slipped, fell and hurt his ankle.

"That had its effect, and the messages combined with it startled Rogden far more quickly than I expected. I managed it so that one of Mr. Brand's cards came into Rogden's possession, and, as I had confidently looked for, he showed up at the office the next morning, and I was ready for him.

"In an atomizer hidden in my desk I had a solution of what the government chemists call 'B. B. B.,' a bleaching solution, which turns white whatever it touches in a very few moments. The process does not take more than ten or fifteen minutes to manifest its effects. When Rogden came to the office he sat down heavily to wait until you were disengaged. I got behind him and sprayed the solution of bleaching fumes over his hair. The liquid becomes gas as soon as it reaches the air, and, as it is almost odorless, Rogden knew nothing whatever of what I had done. And a little later his hair turned gray.

"The next trick which I planned for him, and for which I had made elaborate preparations, had a startling outcome. I meant to put the spell of the withered hand on Rogden, expecting his hand to become infected about a week later; but his sudden death so affected his tissues that the intended miracle began immediately after he was killed. It makes me shudder to think of it now. I must apologize to you for it also, for to accomplish it I had to use your precious tube of radium."

Brand and Mac looked at her in blank astonishment.

"Your radium!" she repeated demurely. "You know that if radium is near human flesh it will make a burned spot within a week. It takes the place quite a while to heal, too. After Mr. Brand went home one afternoon I bored a hole in the big arm of the easy-chair in which his clients are sometimes seated and inserted the radium tube in that, placing a strip at the bottom to keep it from falling out. Then I wheeled the chair into a far corner, and it was not used all the next day. On the following day Rogden arrived, and, after I had sprayed the solution on his hair, I wheeled out the chair and then called you from your laboratory. Rogden sat down in the chair, and thus the spell of the gray hair and the poisoned hand worked.

"Meanwhile Berenice Patterson had grown utterly miserable at home, and when I was able to assure her that Rogden was a married man with a family in Russia, she consented to come with me for a short time, though it meant leaving her mother to the care of the one remaining family servant in order to escape Graffery's persecutions. But Berenice did a very unwise thing. Brooding over her troubles yesterday she became so wrought up that she went to the *News* office and published an announcement that her engagement had been broken. Then, angrier than ever, she went to Rogden's room to denounce him. Mr. Brand has explained what happened when she got there.

"To continue, when I was left alone in the office this morning a message came to Mr. Brand from Washington that Fein was on his way here. Not knowing the clever trick Mr. Brand had played on him, pretending that Rogden was still alive, I assumed that he was coming because he had heard of the murder and wanted to take charge of Rogden's documents and money. Their hiding-place was exactly what we had set out to discover, and so I determined to follow Fein. Jerry, my bell-boy friend, waved to me in my car, which followed yours, when Fein reached the hotel. And behind my car, on the way to the graveyard, was one containing the Blue Triangle bunch, so there was quite a procession going out on the road. Getting back to where I was, however, when I read that message I knew I would have to hurry to make ready. Knowing how much upset Mr. Brand was about Laggis, I mischievously——"

"Mischievously!"

Brand's voice was hard and accusing.

"It was merciless!" he exclaimed bitterly. "That note you wrote me took ten years off my life."

"Say, now, Miss Enid," Mac asked humbly, "d'ye mind telling me what become of Miss Berenice when she got back to shore?"

Enid gave him a wonderful smile.

"She came to me at once when she reached the shore," she told him, "and related all that had happened. And, Mac, she couldn't sing your praises enough. She is very anxious that you call to see her. She wants to thank you, and wants to get better acquainted."

"She does!" crowed Mac, blushing like a beet. "She's a fine girl, now. I'll be there to-morrow morning with sleigh-bells on. I'm going right home now and go to bed. It's time for me to get away, anyhow, for the chief there has got something on his mind he wants to ask you, Miss Enid; I know it, but it's a great secret. Good-night!"

And Enid's smiles and blushes and dancing eyes told them that she had guessed what Brand had to say, and was ready with her answer.

Our next number will contain an interesting detective story, entitled "The Case of Captain Fortesque," by Redfield Ingalls.

TAKE NOTICE!

The feature stories that have been published in this magazine are well worth reading, if you have not already seen them. The list is as follows:

No.
1 THE EEL MAN, by Robert Carlton Brown
2 ZITANA OF MAISON ROUGE, by F. W. Doughty
3 THE MYSTERIOUS WEB, by Armstrong Perry
4 UNDER THE HYPNOTIC SPELL, By Dr. Harry Enton
5 THE SILKEN SHEATH, by Crittenden Marriott
6 A FORTUNE TELLER'S SECRET, by Gladys Hall
7 THE MYSTIC EMBLEM, by Marie Coolidge Rask
8 THE CARDS OF FATE, by William Goode

No.
9 MR. BACHELLER'S APARTMENTS, By William Hamilton Osborne
10 THE INNER WHEEL, by Octavius Roy Cohen
11 THE VOICE OF THE VALLEY, by Robt. C. Brown
12 THE SIGN OF THE SEVEN SHARKS, By Charles F. Oursler
13 UNDER A MASK, by Crittenden Marriott
14 CASE 4,444, by Gladys Hall
15 AFTER A MILLION, by Police Captain Howard

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A ROMANCE OF THE QUAYS

By WESLEY LYMAN

YOU know the quays by the Esplanade des Invalides? Where the Seine glides by at night with an oily swish, swish, like the passing of some great whispering serpent. The Seine is blacker here than at any other place throughout its whole dark course.

I have heard the song of the Seine. It was about twelve months ago that I stood by the quays at the Esplanade des Invalides and gazed down into the black river and heard it whisper its awful promises—and my heart re-echoed the Seine's wild chant. I had intended never to return to the streets of Paris that November night. My route through the city was to be a different one, and I was to float placidly down the great bosom of the Seine, to be intercepted and dragged ashore at some point in my course to create a new sensation for the Parisian press. That was the program I had arranged for myself, and I had the plans all laid. Everything was in readiness, and there was no reason why I should prolong the agony of existence by hesitating over the quays.

"Three hundred francs on twenty!" and she placed the banknotes on the number painted on the table.

It was not fear that made me hesitate. I was not afraid to die. A few weeks before life was sweet. Then I would have dreaded that which I now looked forward to with longing. I was alone in the world, had no one dependent on me and cared naught for the hereafter, which even at the brink of death was only a careless mystery to me. Therefore it was not cowardice that made me hesitate. For some strange reason I loved to stand and brood on my mistakes, and review the happenings of the past three weeks before dropping into the black waters of the Seine. There was not much to review. I had been wealthy—moderately so—had been fond of a gay life and had lost all on the Bourse. My money went in two days, my friends in as many weeks, and hope and happiness soon followed. It was very dark on the quays. I remember leaning against a post and wondering whether I had best remove my shoes before making the fatal plunge or take the interesting leap with all on. It occurred to me that I did not like the feeling of a wet boot on my foot, and I reached down to unlace the shoe. Then the humor of the situation flashed upon me and I actually laughed aloud. There was no mirth in the laugh, but it was involuntary. For fully a minute I thought of the little incident and pictured myself drowning in the river, with all my thoughts intent on the uncomfortable feeling in my feet. Then I laughed again.

The laugh was echoed from a post at my right. The echo was a mocking, mirthless, feminine laugh, and my heart leaped to my throat. Some one had been spying upon me and was now mocking my misery. I peered through the gloom and could vaguely discern a form standing motionless not many feet away. I tried hard to study my neighbor, but made no attempt to advance toward her. Presently I heard a rustle of garments and the figure moved toward me. Right near she came, until I could see that the mocker was a woman with tawny hair that shone in the darkness, and satin garments that glistened when the river threw its reflected sparkle toward us. She stepped so close that her breath came hot in my face, and her eyes glittered as she looked up into mine. I stood like a statue and glared back with a whispered curse.

"So you would do it, too!"-she said in a hissing whisper. "You would sleep in the black waters of the river, but you are afraid to step from off the quays!"

I made no reply, and the woman laughed again.

"Come," said she, gripping my arm with a vise-like

clutch. "I will help you. Be brave with me. We will do it together."

She dragged me toward the river, and I jerked myself loose with a curse.

"Who are you?" I asked. "What are you doing here, you hell fiend?"

I might have shrieked the words, and she alone would have heard them, but the situation was too intense. I spoke in a husky whisper and leaned forward with burning eyes, and a desire to throttle my companion. She made no motion, but in a moment laughed again.

"Who am I?" said she, repeating my question. "What does that matter? If I told you truly, you would not then know, and the real name was lost years ago. What do I here? Ask yourself the same question. You curse me, but we have an equal right to die, have we not?"

Again I muttered imprecations and moved farther back into the shadow.

"There is an old saying that misery loves company," said the woman, "but the adage fails here. You wish to be miserable alone."

Then she came close to me, and this time I did not move away, but looked down at her wonderingly.

"Come," she said softly. "In a moment it is all over. I will give you courage." She grasped me by the hand, and her fingers were icy cold. My hands and temples were burning, and as in a dream I drew her toward me and smoothed back the hair from her forehead. Her face was cold, and I then felt of my own brow. Again the woman laughed.

"You are feverish and I am cold," she said. "But I have had the fever, and it is determination that makes my blood now run sluggish. What do you die for—love?"

Of a sudden a great desire to unburden my sorrows on this woman came over me. But I fought with my inclination, and only answered softly: "No."

There was a moment's silence, and the woman asked:

"What then?"

"I am penniless—the Bourse!" I jerked out, in fierce whispers.

The woman nestled closer to me, and tightened her grip on my hand. Then her eyes gleamed up into mine, and she said:

"Penniless? And jewels in your scarf and rings on your hand? You die for some other reason, surely."

"A few hundred francs will not restore me to my position in the world," I returned bitterly. "I am poor—and for that I die!"

The woman slipped a sparkling bracelet from her wrist, and handed it to me.

"'Tis all I have, but it is valuable," she said. "Take it and live."

'Twas I who laughed this time. I gently placed my arm about her waist, and took one step forward.

"Come," said I. "We will do it together. I have lost thousands, and cannot live on such a meager store. I have spent as much as these will bring in a single night—when I lived."

I startled myself by these last words, for I had spoken as one already dead. The woman held back.

"'Twas a moment ago that you were impatient—now you hesitate, "I whispered softly, bending over so that my lips touched the tawny mass of hair, that shone with a weird luster in the gloom. "Do not be afraid. For what do you die—love?"

Her hand tightened on mine, and her breath came faster, as she said so softly that I could hardly catch the word "perhaps." Then she continued in a stronger voice; "You are a coward! You have all that life can offer, save one thing—money. And you are not willing to work for that, but would rather end your life. What can you know of real sorrow—of blasted hopes, of a wronged and ruined life and a broken heart? I have naught to live for—you everything. You are in despair through one calamity—I from a succession of griefs, each one of which is greater than any which have marked your life. You are a coward!"

I answered nothing and her words but added to the weight of despair that burdened my soul. I realized that what she said was probably true, but I could not, would not live.

Presently she broke away from me and stepped off several paces. Then in a voice which startled me by its loudness she asked sharply and hurriedly:

"You are not lying when you say you die because you are poor? Would you live if your fortune was restored? Would you wish to die if you were again rich?"

She was excited with a new idea. It was infectious and not knowing what her thoughts were I answered huskily:

"No. If I were rich I would not want to die. I cannot stand being poor."

She stepped quickly over to me and placed her hands upon my shoulders.

"I may save you!" she said, her voice low and trembling with excitement. "Give me your jewels and come with me!"

"You cannot save me!" I exclaimed in bewilderment. "My jewels are worth but little. You are mad! Come—the river waits, and our sorrows but grow the stronger."

Again I placed my arm about her to lead her to the brink of the quays. She stopped me with an imperious whisper.

"I offer to try and save you," she said. "I may not succeed, and if we meet with failure we will come back to the quays together. What are a couple of hours? I am willing to live two hours more of soul misery to try and save you. Will you not take the chance?"

I was confused by her manner and remained silent. She reached out her hand and commanded:

"Give me the pins and rings." I complied with the command and then she said: "Now come with me!"

"But where to?" I asked in wonderment, as she started to leave the quays.

The woman came to me and took me by the hand. In this manner we walked slowly away from the alluring whisper of the dark waters.

"They say," said she, "that the right hand of a suicide brings luck in games of chance. Perhaps the right hand of one who is soon to take her own life may also bring luck. We will go to Vautrin's."

Vautrin's! I had heard of the place. Who in Paris had not? A gambling palace where fortunes far more colossal than mine had been, were won and lost in a single night, where the gilded scions of nobility staked their inherited fortunes on the roll of the roulette wheel, where courtesans flaunted their professions before the winners and insulted with ribald remarks the losers, where men entered with the fever of the game hot upon them and left with a grim despair gnawing at their souls—such was Vautrin's.

"I know of the place," I said to the woman. "But I have never been there."

"You prefer gambling on the Bourse to gambling over the wheel," said my companion. "'Tis royal sport either way, but I should like my way best. The place is not far from here, and we will sell the jewels for as much as Vautrin will give. Then we will play—and you shall have a chance for life."

The possibility, rare as it was, of redeeming my for-

tune, excited me. I will not say that a great hope was born within me, for despair had taken too firm a hold upon my mind, to be banished by such a wild chance as was offered. But I was excited and quickened my step. The woman held back.

"Wait," she said. "I will not go until you have made a promise."

"A promise at such a time?" I asked. "'Tis easily made—but perhaps it will be harder kept. A man tottering on the edge of eternity can fulfil but few vows and keep not many promises. If it is a promise that can be kept, I give the promise."

"It is easily kept," said the woman, taking my hand in both of hers, and leaning hard against my shoulder. "We are going to take a rare chance, but we may win. If we win you will live. 'Tis for lack of money that you would die, and if the wheel rolls us wealth, life and happiness will be yours. But it is not for poverty that I would die. Promise me that if our venture brings you luck, you will not hinder me in my plans. I will come back to the quays, and you will go on to the lights and life of Paris."

I was silent, for the promise I was asked to make was a strange one. For a full minute I stood motionless and speechless by her side. Then I again bent over her and drew her closer to me.

"If we win wealth," I whispered, "part will be yours, and then we both will live."

The woman shook her head, and her fierce eyes, the only feature I could clearly discern in the darkness, again sought mine.

"Wealth cannot restore my happiness," she said. "If I wished wealth it were easily got. But money cannot bring back honor or mend a broken life. We both may die—but should you win back life you must not interfere with me. Do you promise?"

I did not hesitate in answering this time. "It is folly to think that we will win," I said. "We will seek the waters of the Seine together. But should the rare chance come to pass, I promise you that I will not interfere with your plans. Come, let us go to Vautrin's. Perhaps the wheel will be kind and roll us life."

"It has rolled many others death," said the woman. "We may win its good graces."

Off from the quays we walked, and quickly made our way on to the lighted thoroughfare. Under the bright glare of the first arc lamp I stopped and looked curiously down at the woman. She looked back at me and gently laughed.

"A strange met pair," she said. "And each would study the other's features. In truth you are a handsome man—far too good-looking to die."

"You are hardly fair," said I, for she had covered her face and head with a filmy veil, and only the fire of her eyes shone out from the meshes.

"At Vautrin's we will know each other better. There is a carriage. I have money enough to pay the fare, if you have not, my penniless misanthrope. Hail the driver."

I did this and in a trice we were rumbling rapidly over the pavements of Paris, to play a game where life was the stake.

The light and grandeur of Vautrin's place could not lift the weight of despair that was on my soul. The painted harpies that flitted from room to room and table to table, did not even inspire me with passing curiosity. The click of the chips, the ring of the coin and the whir of the roulette ball made strange music for my ears, but I heeded it little. On a sofa we sat, and as I gazed down at the veiled face, I felt that the unknown woman exerted a strange influence over me and I was oddly thrilled by the neatness of her presence. Somewhat timidly, I said:

"You are my benefactor, perhaps my savior. Am I never to know your features?"

"'Tis a strange place for a savior to come to and 'twill be a strange game the savior will soon play," said the woman. And then she drew aside her veil. "My face is not unknown here, though a few years ago I would have thought it were far more likely to see the inside of a convent cell than the gilt and tinsel of a gambling hell. Men have said that I am beautiful. Do you not think so?"

The question was frankly asked. Our souls were too stirred with deeper emotions and sterner passions to be influenced by vanity. I gazed long and rapturously at the perfect, dazzling beauty of the woman, and for the time forgot my sorrow. I bashfully touched the mass of tawny hair that shone like an aureole above her features, and said softly:

"You are very, very beautiful—too beautiful to think of death!"

"You are not original," said the woman. "I said nearly that of you. But come. We will learn your fate. It is not well to prolong suspense. Let us see what Vautrin will give for the jewels."

The woman sought out a bald and weazen-featured man and bargained with him, while I stood curiously by. He glanced keenly at the rings and pins and then picked up the bracelet from her open palm. I stepped over to the woman and said lowly:

"You must not sell the bracelet. We are to gamble for my life and must only use my property to play the game with. The bracelet is yours."

She looked up with a bitter smile, which softened and grew wan and sweet before she replied:

"Do you think that I will need the bauble after to-morrow? The bracelet has brought me naught but sorrow. It must be sold."

I did not argue further, but stepped back to allow her an opportunity to complete the bargain. Presently I saw Vautrin count out some banknotes into her hand and the woman came over to me.

"He has given not a fourth of the value of the jewels," said she, "but it matters little. If luck be with us we will win with a small amount as well as with a greater. We must play the game with three hundred francs."

She passed rapidly by several tables, and led me to a table surrounded by a throng of people interested in the playing of two men, one of whom was excited and flushed with enormous winnings, and the other of whom sat with set, stern face, the changing light in his eyes seeming but the reflected despair which was eating at my own heart-strings.

"They are royal gamesters, and they wager heavily," said my companion. "Do you know the game?"

"No," said I, feeling a sort of faint and far-away interest in the proceedings before me.

"There are many ways to wager," said the woman. "By some you can double your wager if you win, some triple, and some obtain thirty-five times the amount of your bet. 'Tis the latter way we must play—a desperate game—but we have a desperate issue at stake. I will place the money on a number, and one whirl of the wheel will give you life or death. What will the number be?"

"You are young," said I, looking down into the fair face, marred by the fire of despair in her eyes.

"I am twenty," said the woman. "Will we play that number?" I nodded assent. She forced her way through the throng by the table, and I followed her.

"I will make one wager," said she quietly to the attendant at the wheel. "Three hundred francs on twenty," and she placed the banknotes on the number painted on the table.

It was not a large wager, but an unusual one made against such heavy odds. The crowd looked curiously at her, and the gambler who had been winning gave a short, nervous laugh. The attendant nodded stoically and spun the wheel and ball.

I heaved a sigh of relief as the whir of the ball sounded in my ears. I knew I would lose and felt that the agony was over. It seemed an age that the ball whirled about in the bowl before dropping, and in the actually brief period I pictured our journey back to the quays, and our plunge together into the black waters of the Seine. And somehow it seemed not altogether unpleasant to die with the tawny-haired woman in my arms.

There was a snap and a click on the wheel and the ball dropped into a pocket. I did not dare look at the machine, and fastened my eyes on the woman's face instead. A quick-drawn breath from her and a low exclamation of wonder from the surrounding throng made me look back at the gaming table.

"Twenty wins," came the sharp voice of the croupier, and I felt the woman nervously clutch me by the hand. The man with the pallor of despair on his face had lost again, and he cursed the woman.

"Over ten thousand francs," said my companion, in a low voice. "'Twill start you on your way in life again. Is it enough?"

Of a sudden the fever of the game was upon me. I grabbed the woman fiercely by the arm and said excitedly, but so low that none else could hear:

"'Tis a paltry sum! I will not have it! Play it again!"

"Then you will not live for ten thousand francs?" said my companion softly.

"Play!" was all I said in a husky undertone.

"I will play ten thousand francs for a repeat on twenty!" announced the woman in a clear voice.

The hand of the croupier was stopped upon the wheel. Noisy exclamations came from the crowd and the woman and I were the center of a wondering gaze.

"'Tis above the limit!" said the croupier. "One thousand francs upon a number, or fifteen thousand francs upon a color! You may wager on the color—the sum is too large for a number bet!"

The woman laughed mockingly. "It is a long time since Vautrin was frightened by a bet," said she. "It is a good story for Paris to hear. I will wager as I say or not at all!"

Back in the crowd about the table a calm voice said:

"It is a mad chance. Let her play the stakes."

It was Vautrin who spoke. The croupier bowed assent and again the wheel was spun. The woman came close to me and I put my arm about her. The hum of the wheel sounded like the roar of a mighty waterfall in my ears and a mist excluded from my sight the crowd, the croupier, the table and all save the great, golden mass of hair that rested near my shoulder. There came again the snap and click which told that the ball had found its home, and then suddenly the woman buried her face against my coat. She had not dared to watch the wheel.

Things grew suddenly clear, and I leaned forward to learn my fate. The croupier announced slowly, as if incredible that such a thing could be:

"The number repeats—twenty wins again!"

The crowd about the table were thrown into a turmoil of excitement. The woman gave a short gasp when the result was announced, and looked up at me in a half-frightened manner. Then she turned hurriedly to the croupier.

"I will play no more!" she exclaimed. The clear voice of Vautrin, back in the crowd, said calmly: "If the lady will step into a rear apartment with me, I will give her her winnings in check. The amount is very large, and would be inconvenient to carry away in any other form, even if we had such an amount of money in the bank."

With a slight pressure of the hand my companion left me, and I pushed my way through the crowd to a secluded corner, where I dropped with a sigh upon a divan. My mind was wonderfully clear. I knew that, through the agency of an unknown woman, in a remarkable manner, my fortune was restored, and I was able to take my accustomed place in the world again. I knew that I had won back life from over the whirring, whirling wheel, but this thought gave me no joy or pleasure, and not an ounce from the weight of misery, which had borne down upon me the past few days, was lifted from my soul. The old grief was banished, but a new and greater sorrow had taken its place. I knew what it was, and quickly decided upon it.

A soft hand was laid on my shoulder and the woman sat on the divan beside me. She was very pale, and her voice trembled when she spoke.

"You asked for my name when we stood on the quays," she said, falteringly. "It is on this paper which gives to you nearly half a million francs. I have endorsed it and you will not wish to die—now. Sometimes, perhaps, you will think of me—in the days to come when you are rich and happy."

I took the paper, but did not glance at it. Instead I gazed into her eyes which were lighted now with a strange, new sadness. Presently she continued:

"You made a promise on the quays and the promise must be kept. The time has come for our parting. You will go out into the life and happiness of the world, and I will go—well—back to the quays."

She smiled sadly as she arose and threw her veil about her head. I rose, too, and grasped her proffered hand.

"I did not promise all that you say," said I slowly. "But what I did promise I will adhere to. Do you wish to go back to the quays?"

"Yes," said she, looking frightened and suspicious at my manner. "You must not interfere with me."

"That is what I promised," I said, "and with your future plans I will in no way interfere—but I will return to the quays with you."

From out the dusk of her veil she looked steadily at me for a moment, and then said simply: "As you will."

Down the carpeted stairs of Vautrin's place we went silently. A carriage was waiting in front and into this I ushered the woman, giving a sharp order to the driver. We spoke no word as we were whirled over the streets of Paris and in silence we alighted not far from the quays. In nervous haste the woman almost dragged me forward until the dark waters of the Seine glistened out beyond the piers. As we again stepped on the quays the woman drew back with a nervous little shudder and then proceeded more slowly. I took her by the arm and led her to a post that stood up gaunt and spectral out of the gloom.

"It was here that we first met," said I. "It was a strange meeting and seems months ago, does it not?"

The woman did not answer, and I continued:

"It was but a few hours ago, but in that time much has happened. Much has happened to me, and—has nothing happened to you?"

I caught a faint sigh and the woman answered lowly, "Yes."

"Then," said I, "you may not wish to die."

She turned fiercely upon me and said in a passionate whisper:

"Yes, more than ever now! You are rich and can go back to your friends and find favor and be respected and

happy. If I went back it would be to the old life that I hate and abhor! I cannot, will not live!"

She started away from me, but I caught her by the arm. "Then you are determined to seek rest in the waters of the river?" I asked, lowly.

"Yes!" she hissed, struggling to free herself. "And you have promised not to hinder me!"

"I will not," said I steadily. "We will take the leap together!"

She looked up at me and her eyes blazed from behind her veil.

"You mock me!" she said in a passionate whisper. "You are rich and have no cause to die!"

I drew her close to me and bent over her until my lips touched the silken film that covered her features.

"I have cause," I said passionately. "A few hours ago I would have died because I was poor—now I would die for love! I adore you! Without you life would not be worth the living, and with you life and poverty would be Paradise! Do not die, my queen! Come back to a new life, to a new happiness—live for me!"

She struggled weakly to release herself, but I would not let her go.

"You do not know what you ask!" she said hoarsely. "You know not who I am!"

"I care not," said I. "Do you not love me?"

"I would be a shame upon your life!"

"Do you not love me?"

"Your friends would sneer at you and cast slurs upon you!"

"Do you not love me?"

"I am a woman of the city—a creature not worthy of you!"

"Do you not love me?"

She was silent for a moment and then the answer came in a sobbing whisper, "God knows I have learned to love you!"

Snatching the veil from her face, I drew her closer to me and covered with kisses the cheeks all wet with tears. Then with my arm about her waist I turned my back upon the dark waters of the Seine.

"We will leave this spot," said I softly, bending over my love and leading her away from the mad chant of the waters. "We will go back to the life of the greatest city and you will help me to be a man!"

She raised her glorious eyes, lustrous with a new light and joy to mine, and softly said:

"And you will help me to be a woman!"

And in the first gray light of the November morning we left the quays.

A remarkable mystery story, "Room 99," will be published in our next number.

QUEER RELIGIOUS CEREMONY

ONE of the strangest religious festivals ever witnessed by civilized man is celebrated every spring in the villages of the Atlas Mountains, the great range between the Desert of Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea in Northern Africa. It is called the feast of the bees, and the busy little honey makers take a leading part in the ceremonies.

The programme begins with a combat between two Berbers, one of whom has his head swathed in yellow cloth, and the other in black, representing yellow and black bees. After this duel, which is to the death, a monk or dervish from the Moslem monastery of Medidjie appears on the scene and a solemn hush falls over the crowd as he capers about to the music of a flute played by himself. The extraordinary fact is that every inch of his naked body is literally covered with bees, and great swarms of the insects surround and follow him. He picks them up in handfuls and throws them to the ground.

Strange to say, he escapes without a sting, although the bees of the Atlas are of the most dangerous type as regards their stinging powers. Scientists who have witnessed the ceremony are unable to explain the source of the dervish's power over the bees, but it has been suggested that he hides a queen bee on his person. Among the medicine men of the Indians of Central and South America many are said to have developed similar powers over the stinging insects. The Medidjie Monastery sends its monks to all the larger villages of the Atlas Mountains and the queer ceremony is repeated in dozens of places.

WHEN FOLKS WENT TO CHURCH BY LAW

NUMEROUS laws in this country, Canada and Great Britain forbid various acts of work and play on Sunday, but not since the lapse of the "blue laws" of Colonial days have Americans been forced by legislation to go to church on the Sabbath. In England, however, it was not until the middle of the last century, during the reign of Queen Victoria, that all penalties for non-attendance at religious services were abolished. Some unusual incidents attended the enforcement of the regulations, particularly upon the Hebrews.

They were not released from the provisions of the law until 1871, and multitudes of them were prosecuted for insisting upon observing their own Sabbath. In the thirteenth century, it is recorded, a Jew of Tewksbury fell into a sewer on a Saturday. Although almost submerged, he would not permit himself to be drawn out, believing that to do so would be to violate the sanctity of the holy day. On the following morning he was quite ready to be removed from his perilous plight, but the authorities, out of reverence for the Christian Sabbath, would not permit the unfortunate man to be rescued until after sunrise on Monday, when he was found to be dead.

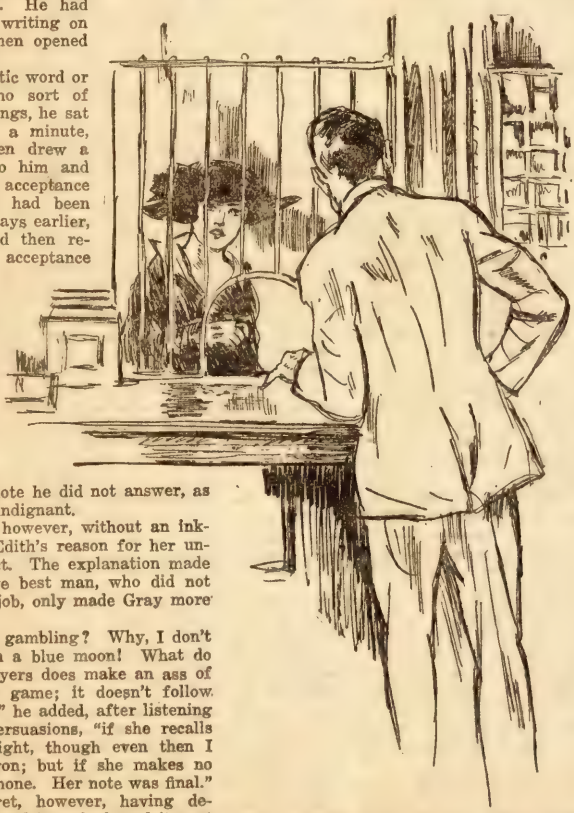
As late as 1830 there were ten persons in English prisons whose only crime was refusal to attend divine services. One of them was a young man who had been convicted at the instigation of his own mother, who appeared against him. In 1817 Sir Montague Burgoyne was haled into court to explain why he had neglected his religious duties. Rigid Sunday observance in England began during the reign of Edgar, in the tenth century, when the Sabbath day was ordained to be kept holy from three o'clock on Saturday afternoon until sunrise on Monday. The most innocent actions were condemned, and death was the extreme penalty for continued violation of the law. About three centuries ago Parliament passed a law imposing a fine of one shilling for remaining away from church on Sunday, unless some good excuse was forthcoming. This act remained in effect until comparatively recent times, and inability or unwillingness to pay the fine resulted in a prison sentence.

CHIPS IN HER PURSE

By MARIE DRESSLER

AFTER a month of unalloyed bliss as the accepted lover of Edith Carrington, after receiving the hearty congratulations of every one on his great luck, Harold Gray was thunderstruck to receive one morning a curt note of dismissal. He had kissed the dainty writing on the outside and then opened it.

After an emphatic word or two, which did no sort of justice to his feelings, he sat dazed. Only for a minute, however. He then drew a sheet of paper to him and wrote a letter of acceptance to an offer that had been made him a few days earlier, and which he had then refused. This acceptance meant that he would leave town the next day. That was exactly what he wanted—to leave her and everything that knew her—he would have liked to get away from himself. Her little note he did not answer, as he was much too indignant.



She grabbed up her tickets, money and purse, and rushed away without waiting for her change.

He did not go, however, without an inkling of the fair Edith's reason for her unreasonable conduct. The explanation made by the prospective best man, who did not want to lose his job, only made Gray more angry.

"On account of gambling? Why, I don't play cards one in a blue moon! What do I care if Tom Sayers does make an ass of himself over the game; it doesn't follow that I shall. No," he added, after listening to his friend's persuasions, "if she recalls her words, all right, though even then I must go to Oregon; but if she makes no sign, I can make none. Her note was final."

Gray did regret, however, having destroyed the note, and if he had read it next day in calmer mood, he would have detected in it a pathetic note that would have outweighed all the unconscious cruelty. He would then have sought her and there would have been no story. But the note was destroyed, so it remained in his memory as a sentence from which there was no appeal.

Receiving no reply, Edith assured herself that she expected none, and was thoroughly miserable, though she made a point of appearing unusually gay. Of this gaiety Gray, far off in Oregon, did not fail to hear, and it added no little to his bitterness. He soon arrived at a state of philosophical resignation, nevertheless, and made the most of whatever pleasures came his way.

After some months in Portland he located at San Francisco, and felt that he had never really lived anywhere else. The past spent in the East was a mere unsatisfactory dream. The cosmopolitan city interested him; he liked the diversity of speech, costume and race, but the beautiful, smooth stretch of water, ocean and bay, and the endless play of light and color on the hills that circled about the city, was a perpetual delight to him. From the farthest squalid sand-hill to the villa-crowned bluff, overlooking Alcatraz and the Golden Gate, he loved it. One thing, he confessed, would have made it completer—the presence of Edith Carrington. With her in such a home as this or that, he would say, as he drove by some pretty house, but he strangled the thought at birth.

There was a jolly set of guests at the Colonial. For outdoor sport there was always the drive to the beach or the Presidio, or a wheel through the park; but the evenings in the hotel were devoted to cards. Unaccustomed to associate the great American game with women, nice women, Gray found a piquancy in having them always in the game; and enjoyed it as he never had the occasions when he "took a hand" in the East in the densely smoky atmosphere always surrounding a "stag" party. The presence of pretty women in their bright evening dresses, with their white hands and flashing gems, gave an artistic touch to the game. Still it did surprise him than a young lady should carry poker chips in her purse.

It was a bright, delicious January morning, after a night of rain, that Gray found that there was at least one young woman in San Francisco who did so. He had been at the Sausalito ferry on business, and, in connection with it, strolled in to see his friend, Jones, who was ticket agent at the office which disburses pasteboards for Oakland, Alameda and Berkely. Jones was busy with the rush of ticket buyers, so Gray seated himself in a chair at the farther corner of the room with his back to the ticket window. As he sat here, thinking of all sorts of things, he was suddenly aroused.

"Two tickets for Oakland, please."

There was nothing to interest him in the words, for voices had been asking for tickets all the time he sat there. It was the voice itself that stirred him. An instant he sat motionless, then jumped to his feet and crossed over to his friend's side. He peered over Jones' shoulder. The square frame of the window was filled with faces, but there was not one that meant anything to him—not one that could have gone with the musical voice he had heard. He glanced beyond the group of commonplace waiting men and women to the narrow door in the wall, where people were trooping into the larger waiting-room that led to the ferry-boat. Two feminine figures were hurrying through, and, as he watched the swish of their skirts, Gray wondered what she might look like—the girl whose voice was so like Edith's.

After musing a moment, he started to follow her and see; but before he could reach it the little door in the wall had closed, and the ringing of the bell and the rush of steam and splash of water announced to him that the *Encinal* had pulled out of the slip.

"Just as well," he thought; "I have no time to go across the bay this morning." He strode back to his seat a little crestfallen, nevertheless. Jones had slammed his window down, and was laying a small pile of silver on one side, muttering as he did so.

"And what were you 'rubber-necking' about, may I ask?" he said, as he turned at last to his friend.

"Oh, nothing," replied Gray.

"You wanted to see the girl that forgot her change, I suppose," Jones laughed. "It was the chips that rattled her, I fancy."

"Chips?" said Gray vacantly.

"Yes, I thought you must have heard them rattle. She had one of those 'dinky' purses knit out of silk, and it's a puzzle to open them and to get at her money; she shook it, and first thing out rolled a lot of poker chips. She handed me a five-dollar gold piece, turned as red as a beet, grabbed up her tickets, money and purse and rushed away without waiting for her change. She must be very new to the game or to California, or maybe both, to make a sneak for a little thing like that."

Gray was not very much interested, but Jones went on: "You'd be surprised to see how often it occurs that people go away without waiting for their change. They usually come back for it, though, so I always put it to one side. Now, she will probably be here along about three or four o'clock."

Gray presently took his leave, entirely oblivious of the business matter he had wanted to mention to Jones. His mind could fix itself on nothing but the sweet voice which had reminded him so strongly of Edith.

"Surely," he told himself, "those crisp, clear tones were her own." He had told her once that were he at the antipodes he would recognize her voice. In a sort of dream he went about all day asking himself continually: "If it could be possible that Edith was here in San Francisco? And, if she were here, did she know of his presence? Would she see him if he found her?"

If so, nothing should prevent him finding her out if by blissful good fortune it was true that she were here. His anger had died out long ago, and he felt a hungry longing to be with her once more, to hold her hand, if not as a lover, then, at least, as a friend. She was right to dismiss him for gambling; he had heard since that it had cost Sayers a good position, and some other fellows something more. It was a bad thing, except, of course, the way he had been playing here; but even that he would gladly give up if Edith would take him back to her heart.

To find her, that was now the burning question. Why had he not moved quicker when he started to go across the bay? Why had he not questioned Jones, who was sure to have noted so perfect a face and figure? He cursed his own stupidity, and glanced across the roofs to the clock in the Chronicle Building. It was past six, and there was just a chance that he could still catch the ticket agent, who had, he knew, rather long hours.

He gathered his overcoat, swung himself into the outside seat of the first car, and was soon in his friend's presence. Jones was a trifle astonished to see him again so soon.

"Pretty girl?" he replied, as Gray questioned him breathlessly. "Of course, stacks of them every day. Let me see—blonde hair and big, gray eyes, and a sort of authority and sweetness in her manner? Why, you must be in love; but I think I know who you mean. Why"—Jones' voice rose to a squeak in his excitement—"she has just gone. You must have passed her just outside. Oh, it's too late now. I saw her get into the car. But she is the girl who forgot to take her change this morning. She just came back on the half-past five boat, and she and her young man called for it."

Gray's face had worn a dozen different expressions during this harangue."

"Her young man?"

"Yes—or her husband. They may be a newly-married couple, for he is nearly always with her."

Jones knew nothing further about the young lady, however, so Gray walked back up Market street so lost in thought that he forgot to take a car.

"Beyond a doubt," so his thoughts ran, "Edith Carrington was Edith Carrington no longer. Nearly three years had elapsed since he had seen her, and full two since he had heard news of her. She was here probably on a wedding journey, if indeed she had not been married for months and months."

It was with a distinct sense of loss that he entered the cozy dining-room at the "Colonial" a half-hour later and seated himself at the only table that was not dismantled. He was joined a little later by Thomas, who usually sat on the other side of the dining-room. Gray rather disliked Thomas, but he greeted him civilly. Thomas, however, was more cheerful than usual; it was his cheerfulness, somehow, that Gray objected to.

"Hello," he remarked, "you look down in the mouth. Gambling?"

Gray shook his head; but the other went on with a chuckle:

"Well, I have lost some money to the prettiest girl in Frisco, so I don't so much mind." Gray wondered languidly what sort of a girl it would be of whom Thomas would speak in this way.

Thomas was reminiscent, and went on in a luscious tone, in which a slight lisp could be detected now and then.

"Best lady I ever met. She seemed to know exactly

when people were bluffing and when they had filled. And luck! well, I never saw anything like it. She stole the biggest pot of the evening. It was opened with jacks. She sat next the opener and raised; a man with kings and a lady with aces up dropped out after the draw, seeing that she stood pat; then the opener dropped out. She kept on raising, and I kept on going one better, for I suspected a bluff, somehow. She had a guitar in her lap, and she picked lightly at the strings and hummed "Paloma," and looked so saucy and sweet and secure that I couldn't give in as long as I had a chip."

"So you called at last?" said Gray.

"When I was a whole stack shy I had to, and she only had an ace high."

Gray joined Thomas in his laugh.

He fancied he could see the fair girl, with her light hair perhaps the least bit ruffled over her white brow, and her saucy smile and song.

"But you had———"

"I? Oh, I only had a ten spot, not a thing in my hand. The people who had laid down were crazy. When she had raked in three of the five pots in the round of jacks I proposed a 'Consolation' and a 'Tiger.' They had none of them ever heard of these things, but they all agreed. I took the 'Consolation,' which was small, and she swiped the 'Tiger,' which was large. I tell you, Gray, I lost my meal ticket that time."

"I think I'd like to meet that young lady. Can't you introduce me?"

"Sure Mike. We got even one way, anyhow. She kept her money in one of these little red silk puzzles, where the thing you want is always at the bottom and everything else on top."

Thomas applied himself earnestly to his dessert, which the white-capped waitress had just brought in. He did not notice how curious a look passed over Gray's face. Another knit purse!

"Her cousins and I didn't do a thing but fill that purse, when her head was turned, with poker chips, and when she next dives into it won't she be surprised! I only hope it will be in church."

Gray beamed upon the insignificant figure before him.

"Perhaps she doesn't go?"

"Oh, yes, she does. She's orthodox; I heard them teasing her about gambling when she had once thought it so dreadful."

Everything seemed to spin around Gray, and he himself seemed a teetotum. He steadied his voice, however, when he spoke.

"Can you make a date for us soon?"

"Oh, yes. I'll telephone over there now."

Thomas dried his fingers leisurely and pushed away his bowl. A little later Gray could hear Thomas in the telephone closet asking: "Is this Mrs. Verdier?" and the answer seemed affirmative.

It is hard to say why Gray did not ask Thomas plumply the name of the brilliant lady; but it is certain he did not, and Thomas somehow never happened to mention it. Perhaps Gray feared disappointment and wished to put it off as long as possible; perhaps he would not acknowledge that he had any hope.

At all events, Gray was as pale and nervous as Thomas was chipper and cheerful when the two were shown into Mrs. Verdier's pretty home on Broadway. Ushered into a quaint apartment, half hall, half sitting-room, they could hear close at hand the soft tinkle of a guitar and the rich tones of a piano in accompaniment. Edith did not play a guitar that ever Gray knew.

There was a blur on his eyes as the crowd of merry people trooped down the two steps from what seemed to be a music-room. In spite of the blur he saw her.

It was Edith Carrington, and Miss Carrington was the name that Thomas pronounced. After a while the blur passed away somewhat, and Gray distinguished that Mrs. Verdier, a handsome brunette, and two fair, boyish young men were in the room. Also a dignified man of middle age, who seemed to be Mr. Verdier.

Gray now remembered hearing of an old schoolmate of Edith's who had married and settled in California. He hoped he had done the proper thing; he could remember hearing Thomas lisp out the names of all these people, but he had not understood them, nor seen them, nor anything, in fact, but Edith, arch, gay and beautiful—how much more beautiful even than of old!

They played poker, Gray losing everything by sheer inability to think of his hand. Twice he drew to pairs. Often he failed to open a jack-pot when he held a flush or full; and did open, to his dismay, on what not being bettered, proved to have been a bobtail. Apart from the rest in the music-room, he found an opportunity of saying a word, of taking her hand, and he knew at last that all was right between them.

The next day a long call and a full explanation occurred.

"Tom Sayers, you know, was such a dear, good fellow," she told Gray, as he sat with an ecstatic countenance before her, "and cards just did spoil him, and made Sue so unhappy; and after we heard of you playing, Sue was horrified, and somehow she got me to promise that I would never marry a card player. And then after you left, and Tom heard why, he quit. And then he seemed so lonesome that just to please him Sue and I learned, and we used to have great games together. So now I only disapprove of gambling when there are no ladies in the game, or, perhaps, when——"

"You yourself are not in?"

Edith nodded.

"But, darling," said Gray softly, "I do not see but what your vow holds good. You have promised not to marry a card-player."

She lifted her eyebrows.

"What of that? After this evening no one can ever persuade me that you are a poker player."

When instant revenge had been taken for this saucy speech, Gray said:

"So it was really gambling that made me lose you?"

"Nothing else."

"But it was cards that brought us together again."

Then he told her, how hearing her voice at the Oakland ferry had started him on her trail, and how vainly he might have looked had it not been for the lucky chance of those chips in her purse.

"What a lot of little links?" she murmured, softly, "in the chain of happenings, all so trivial, and yet each one necessary to bring you to me."

"No, no, no, I must have found you anyhow. It was written."

There was a wedding from Trinity church a few months later, for Gray would not permit Edith to leave him again. Among the wedding presents, not the least valued, was a very complete outfit of poker chips from Richard Thomas, who, with his cheerful lisp and hearty laugh, is a welcome friend and guest always at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Gray.

Read "The Souvenir Corkscrew" in No. 17. It will interest you.

NORRIS'S NIGHTCAP

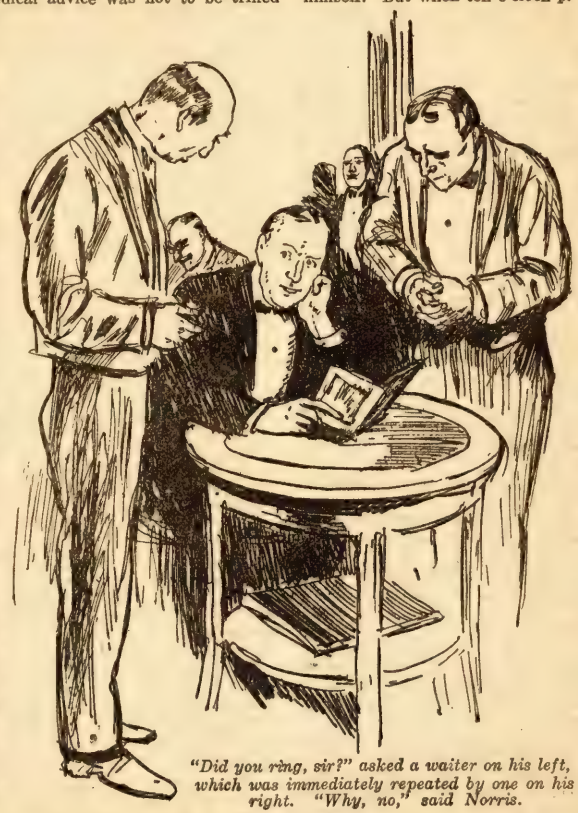
By EDGAR FAWCETT

THE doctor had told him he had better do without it for a while, though he need not consider the abstinence at all enforced. Norris, on his own side, had made a wry face and said that he didn't think it hurt him, but that, of course, medical advice was not to be trifled with. Besides, it made him sleep; he was confident of that.

The doctor blent a wise look with his customary genial one, and replied that there are kinds of sleep to which a moderate amount of insomnia is often preferable. "But, my dear Norris," he went on, "your case is not at all serious, and I think this prescription, which I shall give you, will soon banish its discomforts. The nocturnal toddy is not v e t o e d, remember. Only, if you refrain from it for a fortnight or so, I promise you that no ill effects will result." And here the doctor smiled with cordial irony at his gold-knobbed cane.

Norris was by no means a "free liver." The shackles of habit were odious to him. For years his one brandy-and-soda at the club, between ten and eleven each evening, had been partaken of with no more sense of enchainment than his morning cup of coffee. He called it his nightcap, and he very rarely went to bed with more than one. He was not married, and he occupied apartments only a short distance from his club. Usually he would drop into a lower room there and meet some man with whom he could chat for about an hour. His landlady supplied him with an excellent dinner (more after the fashion of London landladies) when he did not dine out, which was decidedly often. He was what is called an exclusive person, and did not care to be counted among those bachelors who regularly dined at their clubs when not elsewhere expected. In fact, he did nothing at the club of at all a regular sort except to take his nightcap there each evening.

"Of course I'll respect the doctor's advice," he now told himself. But when ten o'clock p. m. came it brought with it a kind of terror. What should he do? Go into the club and sit there, as usual, and talk with somebody and *order no nightcap?* Impossible! A sense of sickening boredom came over him at the thought. H e a v e n s! What a bond he had been forging all these years! And never had it even remotely occurred to him that he was doing so. Tobacco had no charms for him, but doubtless because he had not cared in youth to enslave himself with its nebulous lures.



"Did you ring, sir?" asked a waiter on his left, which was immediately repeated by one on his right. "Why, no," said Norris.

That night he determined not to visit the club at all. He went to his chambers, read there for a little while, and at his accustomed hour was in bed. He had always been an excellent sleeper. To-night he lay awake for three hours, and at last fell asleep, only to dream bad dreams.

The next day he felt mortified and disgusted. It was very trying to make the self-admission that his peace and comfort were going to be imperiled seriously by anything so trivial as the renouncement of a brandy-and-soda nightcap. He began to dread the coming of another night, and found himself recalling the doctor's words about the relative unimportance of giving the potion up. But, nevertheless, he felt quite resolute. The medicine he was taking had caused his slight indisposition, and if any real mischief bode in that time-honored "tipple," he would be wilfully imprudent at his time of life not to forsake it forever.

But "forever" had a very solemn and dreary sound to the ears of his spirit. When ten o'clock again came he had determined to seek the club and look over some of the new illustrated English journals which he knew must now have arrived.

In the large room which he soon entered there were two long, broad tables filled with weekly publications. On these, in their neat, dark morocco bindings glimmered the light of high green-shaded electric lamps. He seated himself in a big leather chair at the corner of one of the tables and took up the *London Illustrated News*. It was brimming with pictures on the subject of the recent royal marriage. There was the bridal procession into the chapel at Buckingham Palace, and the arrival of the Queen with her ladies and gentlemen in waiting, and the departure, at the station, of Princess Maud and her handsome Danish bridegroom, not to speak of the wedding itself, sketched in capable, dramatic way.

At any other time Norris would greatly have enjoyed these drawings. Now his eyes roved listlessly from one to another. His left arm rested on the corner of the table beside him, but it moved oftener than he knew, spurred by a certain uneasiness that swayed his entire frame. Yonder, in his favorite corner, were two old friends—Van Alstyne and Gladwyn. Of course they were expecting him to go over and join them any minute. Each of them, highly respected members, would vary between one and two nightcaps, never passing the second. How pleasant, in ordinary circumstances, to take a seat beside them! But now, as matters were, how ineffably boring! He would have to explain about the abandonment of his nightcap, and that would be such a tedious business, as he didn't feel at all social or conversational, or—what was the other word?—clubbable.

"Did you ring, sir?"

A waiter, decorous, low of voice, stood beside him.

"Ring?" said Norris. "No!"

Scanning his paper again, he gave himself up to a tacit mental growl. Did the servants suppose he couldn't enter this place of an evening without calling for his grog?

Still, he mused, in softening mood, it was no doubt the most natural error. Somebody else had rung—there were men at small tables scattered all over the room—and the summons had been mistaken for his.

"Did you ring, sir?" Another waiter stood close to his elbow, bowing respectfully.

"Why, no!" said Norris. "Did you—er—*think* I rang?" He was vexed, but he never showed ill-temper to servants.

"Yes, sir," the man answered.

"Well, you were wrong. That is all. You can go."

Norris now felt more restless than ever. He stared down at the portraits of Princess Maud and Prince Charles through glasses metaphorically green, and wondered how two such homely persons could be so fond of one another. Perhaps, he soon concluded, it would be best to leave the club. He might take a brisk walk before going to bed. The chances were that he would have an easier night. Just then he heard a cork pop, and looked across the room. There were Van Alstyne and Gladwyn having their nightcaps. Van Alstyne had caught his eye, and was nodding to him.

"Did you ring, sir?"

This waiter Norris had known for years. "Now, see here, Fitzgerald," he said, "you're the third man who's come up during the past five minutes and asked me if I rang! What's the mystery of it?"

Fitzgerald grinned opaquely. "Must be some mistake, sir."

"I hope so," grumbled Norris. He then addressed, in sarcastic undertone, one of Her Royal Highness' bridesmaids. "I hope I'm not the victim of a jocular conspiracy. Last evening I wasn't here, and this evening I present myself, looking a good deal glummer, perhaps, than is my wont, and somebody may have been impudent enough——"

But he dismissed this thought as the very hysteria of morbid suspicion. How old Queen Victoria was getting to look! After all, those stories about her intended abdication might not be idle gossip.

"Did you ring, sir?"

This time it was Matthew, the superintending waiter of the lower floors. Wrath died from Norris' face as he perceived who stood near him. Nobody could scold Matthew, that model of respect, efficiency, diligence, discretion.

"In heaven's name, Matthew, what *does* this mean? It seems to be raining questions, 'did you ring, sir?' and I haven't rung, and I haven't wanted to ring, and I don't intend to ring, and——"

Fitzgerald was reapproaching, and his face beamed with polite inquiry. He looked puzzledly for a second at his superior, Matthew, and then, with a peculiar wistful suavity, said: "This time you *did* ring, for sure, Mr. Norris; ain't that so, sir?"

Norris looked at Matthew. In the look was despair not unmixed with melancholy. It seemed to murmur: "Save me, Matthew, or I perish!"

And then, very suddenly, a keen flash of intelligence darted across Matthew's face. He pointed to the edge of the table, dotted here and there with white specks.

"You've got your elbow on one o' them electric buttons, sir, and every time you move your arm it rings the bell."

"Oh—ah—yes—I see. Thank you, Matthew." And at the same time a voice seemed to be sounding through the soul of Norris:

"*It is fate.*"

Just then he saw his friend, Van Alstyne, half rise and beckon to him with sociable vehemence.

"Matthew," he heard himself saying, "just have some Blue Seal brandy and a bottle of soda sent me over in that corner where Mr. Van Alstyne and Mr. Gladwyn are sitting."

"Very good, sir."

And thus were the barriers of resolution broken down by the mere force of habit.

Watch for "The Prize Winner." It is a rousing story by John J. A'Becket, coming in our next issue.

WOMEN TO TAKE MEN'S PLACES AS CHEMISTS

THAT industrial chemistry is one of the fields in which college women have an opportunity to be of real service to their country by filling the places of men is learned through recent correspondence with large chemical works. The companies are now calling for women to fill positions which formerly were open only to men.

Five junior women in the chemistry course of the University of Wisconsin have volunteered to spend the summer vacation doing men's work in a large iron works.

The one woman graduate in the chemistry course this June will go immediately into a position formerly held by a man.

THE RENEGADE DETECTIVE

A Serial Story

By RANDOLPH BADGER

CHAPTER TEN

THE LOST BOY

SEVERAL days later Delano Joslin met his confederate, the constable, in the private parlor in back of the taproom of the Red Shield Tavern, and there was a look of unspeakable joy upon Rackstraw's fat, red face.

"Well," asked Joslin nervously, "how did you succeed?"

"Splendid!" was the laughing reply.

"You got the money?"

"Yes. I raised that check beautifully."

"Where is my share?"

"Here in this package," replied Rackstraw, handing him a parcel.

"Good; and now let me tell you something. I'm afraid I'll have to skip."

"Eh?" exclaimed the other in alarm. "Anything happened?"

"Dan has received an anoymous note arousing his suspicions."

"On what score?"

"The note said I am an impostor."

"You, of course, denied it?"

"Naturally; but that is not the worst."

"What is up—a streak of bad luck?"

"It seems so. Jigger has created a terrible row."

"How is that?"

"He went to the city, and, procuring a search warrant and a posse of policemen, he went to Grimes' prison and released Thorn."

"Thunder and lightning!" roared Rackstraw in alarm. "I followed them and saw Thorn liberated."

"Where is he now?"

"That is more than I can say; he disappeared."

"And Ralph Desmond?"

"Fortunately for me, Grimes had returned him to the Hermit's Cave."

"Then you yet have him?"

"Yes. I transferred him from there to the wine cellar under Fulton's house."

"That was lucky. What became of Grimes?"

"Jigger made a charge against him of trying to kill him, and he was arrested."

"And his sons, Tom and Jerry?"

"They, too, are in limbo."

"How unfortunate. What are you going to do now?"

"Get rid of old Dan at once, or get as much money as I can and escape before Thorn comes down on me. He has all the information he now wants to free Ralph, and once he is exonerated his wife will give her evidence against me, and I will swing for the murder of Arthur Desmond."

"We must work quick, then. What is your plan—have you formed any?"

"Yes; come to the house to-night at ten o'clock, and you will know all."

The constable nodded, and shortly they separated.

Meantime, while they were speaking, the renegade detective was in the city, lying dangerously ill with pneumonia, in a hospital.

Simon Jigger had called to see him to elicit any information he might have concerning their enemies, but unfortunately the government detective was unconscious for several days and it was impossible for Simon to glean any information. At last he gave up in despair, and returning to the Red Shield Tavern again with Sammy, he disguised himself as a naval officer and began working to get acquainted with Dan Fulton. Having sent him an anonymous note, declaring that Joslin was an impostor, he met the old sailor later on, and, upon declaring that he, too, had retired from the navy, the old man's heart warmed toward him with a fraternal feeling, and Jigger, as Captain Spanker, was invited to the house to dine with old Dan on the very night of the day upon which Joslin met his confederate at the Red Shield, after the consummation of their plan to get money with the raised check. Jigger resolved to accept the invitation, although he realized the danger he incurred by meeting with Joslin, who might penetrate his disguise.

Accordingly, at eight o'clock that night he made his way to Fulton's house, and upon entering the parlor he found Camille and Chiquita present, on the old captain's invitation. Jigger was introduced to them without either recognizing him and learned that they had only consented to call on the captain, who had always shown great friendliness toward them, on hearing that his supposed son would not be at home that night. It was Joslin's object to make them suppose he had gone to the city, so that he could prove an alibi in case of an emergency. In order to successfully carry out this plan, he first said he was going early, then after the captain's guests had arrived, sent word to his "father" that he was not going until later on, as he had been delayed on judicial business and begged to be excused from dining with the guests; he intended going out at a late hour and then return and enter by a back staircase with Rackstraw.

Jigger carried out his part most excellently and made himself so agreeable to the captain and the ladies that they were charmed with him.

During the evening, after they had partaken of an inviting repast, Captain Spanker begged that Captain Fulton would do him the favor to send to his tavern for a young friend whom, he declared, could offer them considerable amusement, and the captain consenting, a servant was summoned, and Jigger gave him a note to Slinking Sammy, who soon arrived and was introduced. The moment Chiquita saw him she started and passed her hand across her brow in a meditative manner.

"Surely," she said, "I have seen this boy before."

"And so have I," added Camille, staring hard at Sammy.

"Oh, yes," said the boy brightly; "I remember youse two ladies."

"Where was it we saw you, my boy?" queried Camille.

"Why, jest in front of your house about four months ago."

"Ah, yes—the acrobat," said Camille, as it flashed over her mind.

"True," murmured Chiquita. "But it was somewhere else, too."

"Somewhere else?" asked Camille in surprise.

"His face is very familiar to me, but I cannot recollect it," said Chiquita.

"Well, ma'am," said Captain Spanker, "mebbe I could help ye thinkin'."

"You, sir?"

"Aye, aye, my lassie. Now then, Sammy, boy——"

"Sammy!" interposed Chiquita, starting, and turning pale.

"That are 'is name, ma'am," replied Captain Spanker.

"Yes; but his appearance in conjunction with it! I——"

She caught the boy by his arm, and bent her earnest glance upon him again—a fervent, piercing wild look that startled the little fellow.

"As to that, ma'am, if you've seen 'im afore, 'raps ef so be as he'll tell ye whar he came from, it may help yer thinkin' some."

"Yes, yes—speak!" murmured Chiquita, still devouring him with her glance.

"Why, misses," said the boy, "I'm only an idle vagabond, and ter tell the truth, I really don't know where I did come from, true's you live. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where did you get him?" asked Camille of the pseudo captain.

At this moment the hall-door opened and Joslin appeared on the threshold.

"Why, ma'am, I found him at the Red Shield. But he told me as 'e war a New York boy. It seems 'at some years ago a man named Johnny Bancroft——"

"Johnny Bancroft!" she interrupted wildly, her clutch on Sammy's arm tightening.

"Aye, a forger, ma'am; he bought the boy, body an' soul, and began educating him to become a regular thief, when, heaven save us, the little cove jest ups with all sails an' runs away. He finally reached Boston, where a chap named Simon Jigger met him half-starved some years later, an' they sorter hitched together like an' lived from hand to mouth until now."

"Stop!" exclaimed Chiquita. "From whom did Bancroft buy this child?"

There was a fearful look of agony and suspense upon her face.

"Why, ma'am, I heered as his name was Delano Joslin."

"My husband!" she shrieked. "And this boy—— Oh, I cannot be mistaken—my heart tells me plainly, he is my son!"

And bursting into a paroxysm of tears, she clasped the astonished boy to her heart and kissed him again and again.

The others were deeply affected, and tears they could not suppress started involuntarily to their eyes as they saw the affecting scene.

"Ah," said Chiquita, looking up through her tears, "I can thank God for this blessing, for I thought my poor little child was lost to me forever."

A fiendish look came over the face of the man in the doorway.

"So," he muttered, "that accursed whelp is my own flesh and blood! And he was thirsting for his father's life not long ago! Strange fatality!"

An odd expression flitted over his face as he softly glided out and shut the door.

It was a little plan of Jigger's to bring the mother and son together thus, to prove by the experiment if they were, as he suspected, really related.

The result exceeded his expectations. His quick eyes, too, had observed Joslin just as he was gliding from the doorway, and he chuckled softly to think what a surprise it must have been to the villain.

"An' are you my mother?" asked Sammy, gazing at the pretty lady half-fearfully and with a tender look. "Oh, I hope so! I never knew in most of my life what it was to have somebody to love me. The curses and cruel blows and despise that everybody heaped upon me everywhere I went were awful and made my heart bleed. Are you truly my mother?"

"Heaven knows that a mother's instinct never deceives her," sobbed Chiquita.

"I am so glad," said the poor little fellow, nestling closer to her side.

"Ah," said Camille, "it is a pleasure to me, Chiquita, to see your happiness. He shall come to my house with you. My home is yours and his always."

"God will reward your kindness, for I can never repay it," murmured Chiquita.

Old Dan gave vent to his feelings in a boisterous manner, and swore that Captain Spanker was the luckiest dog he ever met for consummating so much joy for the little woman under his roof.

It was a late hour when the guests took their departure, and before they had gone a servant had entered to say that Master Harry had gone to the city.

Of a verity, even while the servant was delivering the message, Joslin and Rackstraw were entering the house by the back entrance and gained the room adjoining that of the old sea captain unperceived.

Captain Dan had invited Captain Spanker to stay there overnight, and Spanker consenting, he was shown a room on the other side of that occupied by Dan. The two plotters had no cognizance of this plan, and the old captain thus had two rascals on one side of his bedroom scheming a means to have his life, and on the other side a man who, having overheard the conversation of the plotters in the tavern, was determined to protect the venerable mariner. Jigger knew nothing of the infernal gas arrangement which Joslin had fixed, and when the noxious vapor began to fill the captain's room an hour after he had retired and going through the crevices in a door of communication and entered Simon's room, he did not even then suspect the diabolical plan.

Joslin had added some other chemical, and in half an hour the captain was in a stupor. There was sufficient gas in Jigger's room to keep him awake and send him to his own gas-jet half a dozen times to see if the valve was open and it was escaping.

Then it suddenly dawned upon the detective's mind that there was something wrong, for he felt the vapor gradually stupefying him, too, and hastily rising from his couch he threw open his window.

A cool draught of air swept in, when the nauseous smell of the chemical gas became more easily distinguishable.

"Ah," he muttered, as a shudder convulsed him, "there is foul play here of some sort. It must be that they mean to kill the captain."

He had been going around the room, dressing himself, and paused before the door leading into the captain's room, when he discovered the source of the entrance of the gas. Trying to open the door, it resisted his efforts;

and as he had finished dressing, he quietly made his way out in the hall.

At the same moment Joslin's door was cautiously opened and Rackstraw peered out.

"Any one there?" queried Joslin in a low tone.

"No; the coast is clear," whispered the other.

"Then I will go down. Give me the candle."

Jigger stepped behind a huge oaken closet in the hall. His door was closed, and the hall was as dark as pitch.

"Where is he?" asked Rackstraw.

"Down in the wine cellar, I told you."

"Are you sure that everything is arranged properly?"

"Positive. Dan is stupefied. I saw that his will is made out in my favor, and I have turned his bureau-drawers inside-out, upset everything, and leaving his room in wild disorder, as if some one had been in there ransacking everything. I spilt several pieces of gold beside the bed and about the room. Then I took Desmond's handkerchief and dropped it on the floor, tore the bosom out of his shirt, and put it in Dan's hand and tumbled the bedclothes. All we now need is the man—the circumstantial evidence of his guilt is arranged so cunningly that as soon as Dan is found dead and the insensible form of Desmond beside him with the pistol in his hand, what better proof would be desired than the gold on the floor and in his pockets to convict him of the murder, and point out as a reason for the crime that he came there to rob Dan? Oh, we cannot fail, John."

"My God," muttered the concealed detective, "what a fiendish plan!"

"You get him—I'll stay here," said Rackstraw.

"Very well. Make no noise now, on your life!"

The constable nodded, entered the room, closed the door, and Joslin walked down the hall with the candle in his hand and went down-stairs.

Jigger peeped through the key-hole of the captain's room and saw the captain lying across his bed, as if dead, and the room in a state of confusion.

A few minutes later he heard Joslin returning with Desmond, who was walking up-stairs with him, and then the door opened and Rackstraw came out, and, leaning over the balustrade, peered down. This was a favorable chance, and Simon glided from his place of concealment, brushed past the intent constable, and got in the room unperceived. The door of communication stood wide open and he hastily passed through and glided into a closet, closing the door after him. A moment later Joslin entered the other room with Ralph, followed by Rackstraw.

"Well?" exclaimed Desmond, after Rackstraw closed and locked the door.

"We want you," said Joslin shortly.

"What new villainy are you perpetrating now, rascals?"

"No villainies. You killed Captain Dan—that's all."

"I killed Captain Dan!" was the astonished reply.

"Yes; shot him in order to rob him."

"You are crazy."

"Oh, no! You cannot lie to us. You know you did."

"Do you imagine I am dreaming?"

"Certainly you are."

"By heavens, sir, I——"

"Keep quiet! When you wake up you will see."

"Explain this mystery to me."

"It is no mystery. Do you see these masks on our faces?"

"They do not conceal your identity, for I recognize your voices."

"Bah! You are dreaming, we told you."

"'Tis no dream—it's too real. You are Joslin and Bancroft."

"Ha, ha, ha!" they laughed in chorus.

"Poor wretch!" muttered Jigger. "They want to force him to imagine that he is now asleep like that miserable object in the Arabian Nights, so that when he imagines he awakens to-morrow he will think that he really has been bereft of his sense, and committed the crime they contemplate while asleep."

"You cannot deceive me!" he heard Ralph say firmly.

"Well, we shall see. Smell this!" replied Joslin.

"I won't—it is chloroform."

"You are mistaken—it is cologne."

"No, no! Go away—you shall not force me——"

"Here—hold him tight—ah!" said Joslin. "I have him!"

"Leave me alone. Oh, God! What is this—I faint, I faint! These devils succeed in their plan. Save me! Help, help! I—oh——"

"There he goes!" said Joslin exultingly.

"But those cries!" cried Rackstraw in alarm.

"Do not fear. If they are heard it will be thought Dan uttered them."

"Have you got the pistol?"

"Yes. Ah, you are frightened!"

"So I am. It's terribly risky."

"Coward!" hissed the other. "I will do all."

"I know, but——"

"Silence! It is too late to retreat."

"Well, go on. Help me in with him!"

"Hark, some one is coming up-stairs."

"Then we are lost!"

Rackstraw blew out the candle just as a knock came at the door.

While they all were intent upon listening, Rackstraw crouching close to his companion and both rooms shrouded in darkness, Jigger crept from his place of concealment, grasped the body of the captain, and staggering under the heavy load, carried him into the closet. He then quickly caught up a couple of pillows, thrust them under the bed covers and retreated again.

The person outside the hall continued to knock, and pretty soon called:

"What's the matter, master?"

"It is the cook!" whispered Joslin.

"Hush! She may hear you."

"No danger. Ah, she is going down now."

"Will I light the candle?"

"Yes; meantime I'll drag him in the other room."

The next moment he came in with the insensible form of Ralph Desmond in his arms, and Rackstraw followed with the lit candle.

"The door to the back entrance is open, so we can escape," said Rackstraw.

"Good. Ah, now I have placed him beside the bed. The pistol!"

"Was he under the covers before?"

"I don't know. Ha, here comes that woman up-stairs again! Curse her, why don't she keep away! Quick! Now is our only chance. Run!"

With a frightened glance over his shoulder, the constable ran from the room and at the same moment Joslin aimed the pistol at the spot where he supposed old Dan's head to be, and fired.

A loud report rang through the house; he stooped over the prostrate form of Desmond just as the woman in the hall uttered a wild shriek of alarm, and placing the still smoking pistol in the nerveless hand of the young man, he turned and fled after his companion. They went out by the back entrance which communicated with Joslin's room, and just as the door closed after them, Simon emanated from his place of concealment with a smile of triumph on his face.

(To be continued)

CURRENT NEWS

THIEVES WRITE OF PLAN TO BUY BONDS

Jake Janz, a saloonkeeper in Chicago, is perplexed. Thieves got into his room overnight, took $5,000, part of which comprised savings of a fellow-countryman who trusted him, and in its place left a note that read:

"This is too much money for you, Janz. We are going to invest every dollar of it in Liberty Bonds."

WOULD RETURN KAISER'S GIFT IN FORM OF BULLETS

M. H. Spielmann, a noted art critic of London, protests against the statue of William III., presented by the Kaiser to the British nation eleven years ago, being allowed to remain in front of Kensington Palace. He suggests that it be returned to the donor either in projectile form or in some manner equally appropriate.

FILLING THE FOUNTAIN PEN WITHOUT DROPPER

Oftentimes a person finds an occasion to fill a fountain pen, but they have no dropper handy. So here is a little trick to try on your fountain pen, says the *Electrical Experimenter*. Take a pin or match, and draw a channel out to the edge of the mouth of the ink bottle, with the ink. The ink will follow this channel, and run into the fountain pen, without spilling a drop.

CORN IS FUEL IN ARGENTINA

The highest quality of maize grown in Argentina for many years to-day is being burned as fuel in the industries of the country. The scarcity of shipping prevents the sale of the maize at profitable prices.

The crop this year was a bumper one, owing to the government's exhortations to the people to till their land. The crop is now selling at $15.30 gold per ton for use as fuel.

ACCORDING TO MATHEMATICS

Figured out according to mathematics, if every shipyard in America building steel ships could launch a vessel in each shipway as speedily as the New York Shipbuilding Corporation launched the Tuckahoe (27 days), we should turn out 4,565 ships a year. That is figured on the basis of 404 ways for steel ships and 300 working days a year. If each ship were the same size as the Tuckahoe (approximately 5,550 tons) the total tonnage would be 25,107,500.

GREATER NEW YORK TO GET 2-CENT POSTAGE

Word was received by the New York Chamber of Commerce from Senator Calder that the Senate had passed the amendment to the Post-Office bill fixing a two-cent rate for all first-class mail delivered within New York City. New York is the only city in the country where a three-cent rate is now in effect, and the extra costs to merchants and business men annually amounts to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

President Alfred E. Marling, of the Camber, wired Senator Calder thanking him for his efforts.

GERMAN LANGUAGE BANNED IN SOUTH

German language and German names are being eliminated in the South. The most recent evidence of this fact is shown by the announcement of Rev. Hans Reuter, pastor of the Zion Lutheran Church, Birmingham, Ala., to the effect that he will discontinue preaching sermons in the German tongue. Hundreds of schools have eliminated teaching German, and business houses in several Southern cities have changed from German to English names. At the next session of the Alabama Legislature it is expected a number of American families having German names will ask that they be changed to something more American.

CALIFORNIA BOY, 10, HELD AS SAFE CRACKER

The youngest safe cracker ever captured in Southern California is in the custody of the Pomona police.

He is Terry Bruce, ten years old, who, according to the police, opened a safe in a Claremont feed store.

The boy has confessed, the police say. He entered the store through a window and broke open the safe by hammering off the combination. He took several dollars in change.

The police say the boy found a heavy hammer in the store and had little difficulty in breaking the combination and handle from the safe door. Then, in some freakish way, he managed to swing the door open.

The boy was arrested several days after the robbery.

INDIAN WHO FOUGHT IN CIVIL WAR WEDS

In the auditorium of the P. R. R. Y. M. C. A., in Camden, N. J., Mrs. Anna Hunt Boulton, thirty-nine years old, of No. 428 William street, became the bride of Albert Nichols, otherwise Deerfoot, half-brother of Sitting Bull and of the dead Geronimo, of the Custer massacre.

Deerfoot, who served through the Civil War as a drummer boy, fought the Federal troops on the Western plains; was the friend of Buffalo Bill and a trooper under Roosevelt at San Juan Hill.

The bride was a widow, and Deerfoot, who is sixty-three years old, recently got a divorce from his wife. The ceremony was performed by Rev. William Fisher, pastor of the Kaighn avenue M. E. Church, Camden, N. J.

FIRST HAGUE CONFERENCE

The first International Peace Conference, which seemed the beginning of a new era of civilization, was opened at The Hague nineteen years ago, its object being to eliminate war and substitute arbitration among the nations of the world when disputes arose. The representatives of forty-two nations, assembled in the Dutch capital at the invitation of Czar Nicholas II. of Russia, framed a plan for a permanent tribunal of arbitration. Nine important cases arising from disputes between nations were passed upon by the court, among them the Casablanca difficulty between France and Germany, the "Savarger" case between Great Britain and France, and the North Atlantic fisheries dispute between the United States and Great Britain.

ALIENS SMEAR FARMER WITH TAR AND FEATHERS

Enraged because Albert Philips, an American farmer of Robinson township, refused to buy a Liberty Bond and assist them in their campaign to make their community 100 per cent. patriotic, fifty Austrian miners, technically "alien enemies," spirited him away in an automobile early the other morning and gave him a heavy coating of tar and feathers.

The Austrians, who are employed at the Moon Run mines of the Pittsburgh Coal Company, Pa., have demonstrated their patriotism in all the war work issues presented them and have thus far subscribed to more than $350,000 of the Third Loan. They also warned Philips that he had better "come across" or it might happen again.

CHAMPION KNITTER OF THE NORTHWEST

The champion of the Northwest has been found in Mrs. Anna Hellen of No. 1610 11th avenue, Seattle, Wash., who, while closely watched and timed at division headquarters one day, recently knit one sock in two hours and eighteen and one-half minutes and the other in two hours and nineteen minutes.

The half-minute was used in walking across the floor to cool her hands in water. A half-hour was taken off for lunch between the end of the first sock and the beginning of the second.

Women who watched Mrs. Hellen could not tell which style knitting she was doing, so fast did her fingers go. She says that she knits holding the yarn in the left hand and "picking" it.

The socks were regulation No. 11, knit on No. 3 needles.

PAYS DEBT OF $10 AFTER 23 YEARS

C. B. Verner, of Tuscaloosa, Ala., relates a story of honor among the dusky race which is perhaps without parallel. He tells of a negro who paid a $10 debt after a period of twenty-three years.

According to Mr. Verner's story, he was called to Samantha twenty-three years ago to defend an attachment suit for Peter McGee, a negro, the consideration for his services to be $15. The negro paid him $5 in cash at the time, and gave him a note for the balance, $10.

Immediately afterward Mr. Verner was called to South Carolina by the illness of his father, and had forgotten all about the note until recently, when the colored man saw him and, recognizing him, paid over the balance due, stating that he had thought Mr. Verner moved to South Carolina "way back yonder twenty years ago."

STAMPS BOUGHT FOR $24 ARE SOLD FOR $20,000

A sheet of one hundred of the new postal airplane stamps, but with the airplane turned upside-down through an error made by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing at Washington, has been purchased for $20,000 by Colonel E. H. R. Green, of Texas, son of the late Hetty Green, it was learned the other day. Over a window counter at the post-office in Washington this sheet sold for $24.

The stamps were refused by a Washington citizen at the stamp window because the airplane was inverted. In the line behind him was a man who realized the philatelic value of the sheet and purchased it at its face value. He sold it to a Philadelphia stamp dealer, who disposed of it to Colonel Green.

It is predicted by philatelists that if the sheet proves to be the only one in existence outside of government ownership the stamps will attain a philatelic value of $250 each.

FINE HOSPITAL TRAINS FOR OUR ARMY

Descriptions of the hospital trains for the American army—some of which already have been completed in England—show that nothing for the care and comfort of our wounded soldiers is being left undone. Each car is a model of up-to-date equipment, containing a heater, electric fans and phonograph. Coaches for the seriously wounded have three rows of comfortable bunks on each side. For the slightly injured, luxuriously cushioned seats are provided.

This was not the case at the outbreak of hostilities. No special equipment had been provided, and the tens of thousands of wounded had to be packed into ordinary coaches, cattle and freight cars, and even placed on flatcars, with no protection from rain or snow except blankets. Even this does not tell the whole story. The chief business of war is destruction, and during the first months it often took hospital trains forty-eight hours to travel a hundred miles or less, because they were frequently sidetracked to make way for other trains of ammunition or fresh troops urgently needed at the front.

CARING FOR RUBBERS TO MAKE THEM WEAR LONGER

Rubber overshoes, like everything else just now, are expensive, and sometimes hard to get at any price. Any suggestion as to how to make them last longer will, therefore, be appreciated. If you will give them a little extra care and attention you will be more than repaid for the trouble. *Popular Science Monthly* offers the following suggestions:

All oils, fats, milk or acids will cause rubber to blister, soften and wear out quickly. Therefore keep them away from your overshoes. When soiled, wash the rubbers with lukewarm water. Do not put them near a hot stove or steam pipe, as the heat will make them crack. Do not leave the rubbers outside of the house, exposed, for sunlight will heat and crack them. Freezing will also make them brittle, so that they are likely to crack when they are put on. Of course it would be rank foolishness to try to wear high-heeled rubbers on low-heel shoes, or low-heeled rubbers on high-heeled shoes. In either case, the rubbers would very soon break out at the heel.

MANY FOOLISH THINGS MAILED TO SOLDIERS

The Boston Post-Office protests against the number of parcels of useless things that are being mailed to our soldiers overseas—parcels that take up time in handling that could much better be devoted to other more useful things.

The Boston *Herald* says that "one day's inspection in New York recently disclosed 1,642 boxes of matches, for example, though the shipment of inflammables is forbidden even in domestic mails. One parcel had a bouquet of artificial flowers, one a baby outfit and one a quart of whisky. Many packages had fruit, sure to become bruised and rotten before reaching the soldiers, who have the privilege of buying fresh fruit, fresh from Italy and Spain, at the Y. M. C. A. recreation rooms at their camps. In fact, two-thirds of the articles found in that day's inspection are on General Pershing's canteen list and are sold to the soldiers at virtually wholesale prices."

The quantity is illustrated by a recent shipment of mail on an army transport that contained 715,980 letters and 335,840 parcels, the letters filling 346 sacks and the parcels 7,452 sacks. All this when it got to France filled a train of nineteen cars.

WHAT GREAT CANALS HAVE COST

In engineering difficulties overcome and in cost of construction, the Panama Canal stands at the head of the world's greatest artificial waterways. The appropriations made by Congress for its construction amounted to something like $350,000,000. Of the other "big ditches," the Suez Canal, connecting the Mediterranean and Red Seas and completed in 1869, cost about $100,000,000.

The Manchester Ship Canal, inaugurated by Queen Victoria in 1894, is 35½ miles long and cost $85,000,000. It connects Manchester with Liverpool, making a seaport of the big industrial city. It was a remarkable achievement, being built through a densely populated country.

Most frequently mentioned in the war news is the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal, better known as the Kiel Canal, which is sixty miles long and connects the Baltic and the North Seas. Completed in 1895 at a cost of $40,000,000, it has proved, from the standpoint of naval strategy, of inestimable value to Germany.

The longest canal in the world is the Erie Canal, 387 miles in length, finished in 1826. Its cost, including improvements, was $52,000,000. It has been superseded by the greater Barge Canal, which may perhaps solve America's war-time transportation problem.

CHINESE TOBACCO IN AMERICAN CIGARETTES

The increased shipment of South China tobacco to the United States during 1917 has continued into the present year in even increasing volume, and there is reason to believe the trade will continue after the war. Normally Chinese tobacco can be had at much lower rates, comparatively, than the tobaccos from Turkey and the Near East, which it has been supplanting in the American and Egyptian markets. Shipments of tobacco to the United States through Hong Kong last year were valued at $461,474, as compared with a total of $110,994 in 1916 and $35,573 in 1915. Before the war shipments were confined to tobacco for the use of Chinese residents in the United States. The exports promise a value of about $125,000 for the first quarter of 1918, or substantially three times the shipments for the corresponding period a year ago.

With the shutting off of the supply of Turkish and Near Eastern tobacco in the United States, a field for the South China product has been opened for use in cigarette mixtures.

The continuation of this trade after the war is largely a matter of silver exchange. At present the high price of silver renders the cost of Chinese tobacco to American importers about twice its normal price.

INDIANS LIVED IN FLATS

Not the crowded cities of the East, but the vast expanses of the West gave America its first apartment house. Excavations in the "Aztec ruins" of Northwestern New Mexico, directed by the American Museum of Natural History, and the most extensive of the kind ever undertaken in this country, have uncovered a sandstone building, 359 by 280 feet, three stories high, and built around three sides of a court. There are more than two hundred rooms on the ground floor and in them lived many centuries ago the ancestors of our Pueblo Indians.

This relic of a high state of primitive civilization rises to a height of forty feet, and on the inside is built in wide terraces so that each story has its own roof. One side of the court is open, giving air and sunshine to all the rooms. In this tribal home each family had its separate quarters, but it was also a well-devised village fortress. The upper stories could only be reached by movable ladders and in case of attack the defenders could sturdily resist from floor to floor.

The excavations are being made in the valley of the Animas River and within a single mile are to be found the ruins of nearly a hundred of these community dwellings.

The dwellers in the structure already uncovered may have been exterminated by an enemy, for it seems to have been hastily abandoned. In the rooms were found bodies, stone implements and pottery vessels, apparently standing where they had last been used.

THUGS WERE ONCE A RELIGIOUS SECT

The word "thug" has an interesting historical origin and comes to us from India. In a recent address in England Rudyard Kipling told the story as follows:

"Once upon a time, a hundred years ago, there was a large and highly organized community in India who lived by assassination and robbery. They were educated to it from their infancy; they followed it as a profession, and it was also their religion. They were called Thugs. Their method was to disguise themselves as pilgrims or travelers or merchants and to join with parties of pilgrims, travelers and merchants moving about India. They got into the confidence of their victims, found out what they had on them, and in due time—after weeks or months of acquaintance—they killed them by giving them poisoned foods—sweetmeats for choice—or by strangling them from behind, as they sat over the fire of an evening, with a knotted towel or a specially prepared piece of rope. They then stripped the corpse of all valuables, threw it down a well or buried it, and went on to the next job.

"At last things got so bad that the Government of India had to interfere. Like all governments, it created a department—the Department of Thuggee—to deal with the situation. Unlike most departments, this department worked well, and after many years of tracking down and hanging up the actual murderers, and imprisoning their spies and confederates, who included all ranks of society, it put an end to the whole business of Thuggee."

WHAT IT MEANS WHEN A WATCH IS ADJUSTED

The word "adjusted" is frequently seen on watches. Sometimes it is put on fraudulently—that is, when the watch has not really undergone the operation technically understood by this word. An adjusted watch may be regulated to run at a satisfactory rate while at a certain temperature, but the rate will change according to the increase or reduction of the temperature.

The better grade of watches are so made as to be capable of automatic compensation for temperature changes. This is accomplished by the use of two different metals on the watch balance—steel and brass—one of which expands more than the other under the influence of heat.

The question of compensation is one of the most important in watchmaking and has received much attention from many expert horologists.

In addition to temperature adjustment, the high-grade movements are adjusted also to positions—three positions in the ordinary grades and five in the higher. Each movement has distinctly marked upon it the number of positions to which it has been adjusted. This art of adjusting requires exceptional skill. Judgment based on years of experience is required. The adjuster must understand the various manipulations to be made, the condition and action of the hairspring, the poise of the balance, the proper size and condition of the balance pivots, the shape and polish of the balance jewels, as well as other conditions which the trained eye and ear of the expert alone can detect.

SALE OF FIREARMS AFFECTED BY THE WAR

The war has had two opposite effects on the sale of firearms. On one side there has been a decided decrease in shooting wild game, due also in part to the enactment and enforcement of Federal game laws protecting migratory birds. This is evident not only in the falling off in sales of shotguns, but also of loaded shells and hunting appurtenances. On the other hand, the government demand for munitions of war has not only created a pronounced scarcity in many lines directly affected, such as metallic cartridges and revolvers, but also in those lines where this government demand has shifted the use of men and machinery from articles like sporting rifles and shotguns to rifles needed for the soldiers, thus creating a great scarcity of the former articles in the domestic trade.

It is very difficult to get revolvers at all for the regular trade, and automatic pistols practically cannot be had. Loaded shells for trap shooting sell only in a very limited way, for clay pigeon shooting is a sport kept up almost entirely in times of peace by persistent propaganda. Naturally, in time of war it falls to a very low estate. The sale of blank cartridges, formerly used mostly for Fourth of July celebrations and the like, is practically extinct now, as a matter of conserving men and material to make cartridges for war purposes.

The demand for leggings for army uses far outstrips the supply, while those for hunting purposes sell in much reduced volume. All kinds of reloading tools and implements in connection with the hunter loading his own shells are practically a thing of the past, and linger on in fast-dying fashion.

FOUNDATION COMPANY BUILDS NONSINKABLES

Contracts for five vessels of a type said to be nonsinkable have been let by one of the Allied Governments to the Foundation Company, according to an announcement by Franklin Remington, president of the company, which is published in the *Nautical Gazette*. The order followed tests with an experimental boat which proved highly satisfactory. The Foundation Company has acquired the site for a yard near New Orleans and is equipping a plant for the construction of the nonsinkables. According to the present schedule the first hull will be launched early next year, and the first completed vessel will be ready in April, 1919. The vessels are to be of 4,200 tons deadweight each.

The hull consists of two parallel cylindrical shells joined throughout their length by a series of heavily braced diaphragms. The nonsinkable feature, or rather the ability to resist submarine attack, depends upon the improbability of the vessel being struck by torpedoes on both sides. Each cylindrical shell is divided not only into watertight compartments by transverse bulkheads but also is isolated entirely from the adjoining shell and from the sealed space between the two. The latter space, which has a watertight bottom and deck is not used for cargo, but is provided solely for reserve buoyancy.

The proportions of the ships are such that it will not sink even though all of the compartments on one side are flooded. The ship will be propelled by twin 700-horsepower steam engines supplied by oil-fired boilers, one complete unit installed in each half of the hull. The units are independent so that if one is put out of commission the other will be able to bring the vessel into port.

GERMANS USE TWENTY POISON GASES

According to Major S. J. M. Auld of the British Military Mission, at least twenty noxious gases are or have been used in this war. The Journal of the *American Medical Association* tells of some of the worst.

The first was chlorine, against which the mask containing an alkali carbonate is a good protection. Then came carbonyl chloride, or phosgen; sodium phenate in the helmets was found to be a protection against this except when concentrated, and then hexamethylenamin has to be added.

The "tear" gases were xylyl bromide or benzyl bromide at first; then came trichloromethyl-chloroformate and, later, phenyl carbylamin chloride. The "sneezing" gas is diphenyl-chloroarsin, the object of which was to make a soldier sneeze his gas mask off.

The surprise of last year was the so-called "mustard gas," dichloro-diethyl-sulphide, of which as many as 50,000 shells have been fired in a single night's bombardment. The effect of this "superlacrimator" is most insidious. "The gas has a distinctive smell, rather like garlic than mustard. It has no immediate effect on the eyes beyond a slight irritation. After several hours the eyes begin to swell and inflame and practically blister, causing intense pain, the nose discharges freely and severe coughing and even vomiting ensue. Direct contact with the spray causes severe blistering of the skin, and the concentrated vapor penetrates the clothing. The respirators, of course, do not protect against this blistering."

The Journal of the *American Medical Association* adds in significant capital letters: "Meanwhile, the chemical laboratories of the Allies have not been idle."

BEAUTY OF JEWELS RESTORED BY "GEM DOCTORS"

Women fortunate enough to possess precious stones should wear their gems frequently and not permit them to deteriorate through long disuse, according to jewelry experts. All jewels, especially pearls, seem to be injured if kept too long in darkness. It has also been shown that there apparently is some real basis for the old superstition that gems suffer when their owners are ill, to which has been coupled the belief that they foretell disaster. Their beauty is said to have been often restored when worn by a person in good health, which accounts for the reputation some persons have gained as successful "doctors" of sick gems.

Turquoises quickly lose their brightness when the water is in bad physical condition, and one London woman has built up a business by restoring their lustre, her patrons believing that she possesses some peculiar quality which redoubles the beauty of these stones.

Jewelers say that pearls may be affected by the dye in the lining of a jewel case, if shut up too long, but that their beauty will return if worn for a time next to the body. A long bath in sea water often has the same effect. Some years ago it was reported that the pearls in a celebrated necklace of Mme. Thiers in the Louvre were shrinking in size and turning back. A sapphire, which, it was once believed, would change to a deep violet tint if the lady wearing it had not been true to her lover, is in the South Kensington Museum in London.

There are many stories of rubies which, by changing color, foretold the death of some one near and dear to the wearer, and red coral was once supposed to grow pale when the owner was about to be seriously ill. Many still have a superstitious feeling about opals.

A thorough cleaning or a better setting will improve the appearance of jewels. Their color brightens or diminishes according to the light in which they are shown, and they may be affected by acids, but there seems no doubt that some persons have a quality which brings out the richest and deepest colors of precious stones. From these are recruited the "gem doctors," who are called on from time to time to restore the beauty of famous jewels.

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Who will write the SONG-HIT OF THE WAR?

With this country entering its second year in the "World War" it is doubtful if the song which will be known as the "Hit of the War," has as yet made its appearance. While it is true that such War Songs as "Over There" and "Liberty Bell" have made some impression, have Our Boys adopted another "It's A Long Way To Tipperary," which has been the great favorite with the "English Tommies"? Inasmuch as several Commanders of our training cantonments have requested boys in the service to write such a song, it appears to be still wanting.

Have you an idea which you think might be used as the subject for a Patriotic or War Song? If so, you may secure some valuable information and assistance by writing for a Free Copy of our new booklet, entitled "SONG WRITERS' MANUAL AND GUIDE." We revise song-poems, compose and arrange music, secure copyright and facilitate free publication or outright sale. Poems submitted examined FREE.

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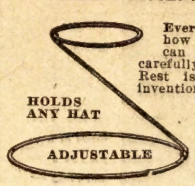
For Lady's Hat

A Woman's Invention for Women



Every woman knows how easily a nice hat can be damaged if not carefully kept. This Hat Rest is the long-needed invention. Adjusts itself to any height; can be flattened for packing in handbag. Strong steel, nickel plated. May be made pretty by adding ribbons—a lovely present when completed. Price of the Lady's Hat Rest, 25 cents; 5 for $1. Postpaid. Send cash or stamps. Agents wanted. ELIZABETH KING, RB-101, Station F, New York.

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A Message to Women Who are Over-Stout

You know that an excess of fat is detrimental to your health and figure. Moreover, it has a tendency to make you irritable.

You do not need to be over-stout. Actresses keep their figures and their health. They do not starve themselves nor exercise tediously, because if they were to do so, they could not maintain their lithesome and cheerful ways.

Neither can actresses make themselves miserable by taking salts, or other cathartics incessantly.

The secret of many beautiful women's figures, and of their health, lies in the adoption of a simple, easily followed method known as the Korein 7 System, which includes seven rules.

These rules are not severe. They include the habit of deep breathing, walking or other convenient exercises, eating slowly, chewing the food well, etc., and in taking oil of korein.

Such drastic ingredients as thyroid, calomel, epsom salts, pulsatilla and other similarly powerful—and often dangerous—drugs form no component of the treatment. The oil of korein is composed chiefly of a concentrated extract of the vegetable sea-weed fucus vesiculosus, from the far-away seacoasts of Japan, and other countries bordering upon the oceans. It is perfectly safe.

You may adopt this safe method for reducing your weight under the cash guarantee of $100. which means that if you follow the Korein System and do not obtain whatever reduction you desire, you will be repaid whatever you pay for oil of korein at the drug store, or from the Korein Company.

If you are over-fat in any part of your body, or in several parts, you may now proceed with confidence to reduce your weight.

Reduce your fatty abdomen or chest, take down the adiposity on your neck, arms, shoulders, hips or limbs. If there is a bagginess of superfluous flesh on your face, if you have what is called a double chin, you should proceed now to reduce these to normal.

Reduction ranging from 10 to 60 pounds is attainable—even greater reductions have been reported by persons who have followed this method.

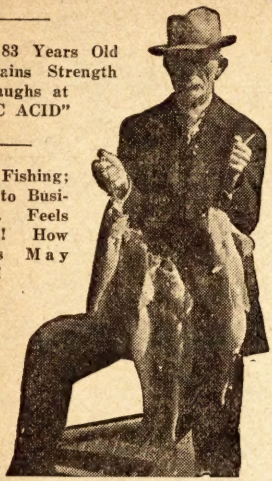
You may obtain oil of korein at the drug store; or if the druggist has none in stock he will get it for you. Or obtain your supply directly from headquarters, by mail, in plainly wrapped package, postpaid.

A booklet entitled "Reduce Weight Happily" will be mailed to you (in plain envelope) on request. Address Korein Company, NE-101, Station F, New York, N. Y. Remember the guarantee. It is absolute—your money-back protection. Do not put off your weight reduction. Now is the time to get the full benefit. Surprise yourself and your friends.

Finds Cure For Rheumatism After Suffering 50 Years

Now 83 Years Old —Regains Strength and laughs at "URIC ACID"

Goes Fishing; Back to Business. Feels Fine! How Others May Do It!



"I am eighty-three years old and I doctored for rheumatism ever since I came out of the army over fifty years ago. Like many others, I spent money freely for so-called 'cures,' and I have read about 'Uric Acid' until I could almost taste it. I could not sleep nights or walk without pain; my hands were so sore and stiff I could not hold a pen. But now I am again in active business and can walk with ease or write all day with comfort. Friends are surprised at the change."

HOW IT HAPPENED.

Mr. Ashelman is only one of thousands who suffered for years, owing to the general belief in the old, false theory that "Uric Acid" causes rheumatism. This erroneous belief induced him and legions of unfortunate men and women to take wrong treatments. You might just as well attempt to put out a fire with oil as to try and get rid of your rheumatism, neuritis and like complaints, by taking treatment supposed to drive Uric Acid out of your blood and body. Many physicians and scientists now know that Uric Acid never did, never can and never will cause rheumatism; that it is a natural and necessary constituent of the blood; that it is found in every new-born babe, and that without it we could not live!

HOW OTHERS MAY BENEFIT FROM A GENEROUS GIFT.

These statements may seem strange to some folks, because nearly all sufferers have all along been led to believe in the old "Uric Acid" humbug. It took Mr. Ashelman fifty years to find out this truth. He learned how to get rid of the true cause of his rheumatism, other disorders and recover his strength from "The Inner Mysteries," a remarkable book that is now being distributed free by an authority who devoted over twenty years to the scientific study of this particular trouble. If any reader of the "Mystery Magazine" wishes a copy of this book that reveals startling facts overlooked by doctors and scientists for centuries past, simply send a post-card or letter to H. P. Clearwater, 534 Water street, Hallowell, Maine, and it will be sent by return mail without any charge whatever. Send now. You may never get this opportunity again. If not a sufferer yourself, hand this good news to some friend who may be afflicted.

DOUBLE CHIN Reduce it to beautiful firm white flesh by using oil of korein, and following directions therewith. Buy at the drug store.

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Easily Conquered in 3 Days

Picture No. 1—*Shows how tobacco has nearly wrecked a man's career. He has become nervous, dyspeptic and irritable; he cannot sleep well, has lost his energy and ambition.* **No. 2**—*The doctor says: "I'm giving you this medicine but it will do very little good, unless you stop killing yourself with tobacco."* **No. 3**—*Still a slave; another collapse.* **No. 4**—*Wife reads advertisement of Mr. Woods.* **No. 5**—*Writes for Woods' FREE BOOK.* **No. 6**—*Being convinced by multitude of proofs, he has ordered remedy which is in box postman is now delivering.* **No. 7**—*Has begun to overcome tobacco craving. Already is feeling much better; vigor and ambition returning.* **No. 8**—*Surprising improvement; all craving gone, filled with new courage and backed by good health.* **No. 9**—*Beginning anew.* **No. 10**—*Succeeding in business.* **No. 11**—*No trouble to resist temptation of tobacco in any form.* **No. 12**—*By clear-headedness, good health and energy, he has now become prosperous.*

Would You Like to Quit Tobacco Quickly and Easily and Enjoy Yourself a Thousand Times Better While in Robust Health?

STOP RUINING YOUR LIFE

Why continue to commit slow suicide when **you can live a really contented life,** if you only **get your body and nerves right?** It is unsafe and torturing to attempt to rid oneself of tobacco by suddenly stopping with "will-power"—don't do it. The correct way is **to eliminate nicotine poison from the system,** and genuinely **overcome the craving.**

Tobacco is poisonous and seriously injures health in several ways, causing such disorders as nervous dyspepsia, **sleeplessness,** gas belching, **gnawing,** or other uncomfortable sensation in stomach; **constipation, headache,** weak eyes, **loss of vigor,** red spots on skin, **throat irritation,** catarrh, asthma, bronchitis, **heart failure, melancholy,** kidney trouble, **impure** (poisoned) **blood,** heartburn, torpid liver, **loss of appetite,** bad teeth, **foul breath,** lassitude, **lack of ambition,** weakening and falling out of hair and many other disorders.

Overcome that peculiar nervousness and craving for cigarettes, cigars, pipe, chewing tobacco, or snuff.

Here is an opportunity to receive **FREE** a carefully compiled **treatise on the subject,** containing interesting and valuable information that you should be glad to learn perfectly. The book tells all about the **renowned THREE DAYS' METHOD** by which **thousands and thousands saved themselves from the life-wrecking tobacco habit.** Full particulars, including the book on tobacco and snuff habit, will be mailed **FREE TO YOU,** in plain wrapper, postpaid. All you need do is **merely REQUEST IT.** A postcard will do. Address

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NOTE.—To those who are injuring their health, making themselves nervous, dyspeptic, etc., by excessive use of cigarettes, cigars, pipe, snuff or chewing tobacco:—here is your opportunity to quickly and easily become your own master.

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